# Seasonality in New Zealand:

# Perceptions of Tourism Operators in Queenstown

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# ABSTRACT

Although the effects of seasonality on the tourism industry and associated businesses are well known, research into the causes, characteristics, and implications of seasonality as it pertains to tourism remains very much in its infancy. Rather than evaluating the more traditional external indicators of seasonality, this research explored the concept of seasonality from the perspective of the tourism operator, using the Queenstown, New Zealand tourism industry as a case study area. Understanding the perception of the business owner and operator with respect to the impact of seasonality was crucial to determining the effectiveness of strategies implemented to manage and/or counteract seasonality negative impacts. This examination highlighted the principal strategies adopted by the tourism industry in five business sectors to manage the negative effects of seasonality. A qualitative research approach, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was the method chosen to be most effective at assessing perceptions of seasonality in Queenstown. Resultant data was analysed using framework analysis techniques in order to identify patterns and common themes within the data, leading to the uncovering of four themes in the seasonality perceptions of Queenstown tourism operators: staffing, infrastructure, monetary/management of business, and seasonal peaks. These results and the ensuing discussion were intended to facilitate further communication and consultation among the operators to delineate their challenges and solutions, thus contributing to better planning and sustainable tourism for all operators and stakeholders. The main recommendation is that business plans must not be rigid and inflexible and must be broad enough to cope with change inherent in seasonality

# PREFACE

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

The central objective of the research presented in this thesis is to identify and characterise the predominant perceptions and understandings of the concept of '*seasonality*' held by business operators in Queenstown, New Zealand's tourism sector. Seasonality is generally understood as a "temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, [which] may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as number of visitors, expenditures of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions" (Butler 1994, p.332). Although the effects of seasonality on the tourist industry and associated businesses are well known (e.g., seasonal income and employment), research into the causes, characteristics, and implications of seasonality as it pertains to tourism remains very much in its infancy.

BarOn (1975), Butler (1994), Lundtorp (2001) and Baum (1999, 2001) are leading researchers whose work has provided a fundamental framework outlining what seasonality is and why its effects can be considerable, particularly in regards to smaller tourist centres such as Queenstown, New Zealand. Rather than evaluating the more traditional external indicators of seasonality (e.g., employment trends, seasonal fluctuations in business profit, community population numbers, and so forth), this thesis explores the concept of seasonality from the perspective of the tourism operator, using the Queenstown tourist industry as a case study area. In order to achieve this, it is critical to understand what seasonality is and, additionally, to recognise how governments, investors, and the tourism industry, including the main tourism business sectors (e.g., retail, restaurants, accommodations, transportation, and outdoor recreation), work within the confines of seasonality. Finally, understanding each area and its orientation towards profitable tourism and management of seasonality will reveal current trends and perceptions of seasonality held by tourism operators, which in turn can contribute to planning and policy generation in other destinations where seasonality affects the tourist trade.

In order to investigate the effects of seasonality, the Queenstown tourism business sector was chosen as a case study area. Ten responses were acquired using qualitative semi-structured interviews (henceforth referred to as 'samples') from five main tourism sectors in Queenstown, including *accommodations*, *retail*, *restaurants*, *outdoor recreation*, and *transportation*. Two samples were collected from each of these sectors in an attempt to gain a 'sector-specific' understanding of what tourism operators perceive seasonality to be and what are its consequences for the well-being of that particular sector. This chapter will outline the area, purpose, and key aims and objectives of the research presented in the subsequent chapters in the examination of the perceptions of seasonality in the Queenstown tourism business community.

## 1.1 Context and Research Purpose

Identifying, characterising, and objectively evaluating the challenges of seasonality in the Queenstown tourism industry are key themes examined in this thesis. This examination will highlight the principal strategies adopted by a sample of operators in the tourism industry to manage the negative effects of seasonality, particularly with respect to building a long-term and sustainable tourist industry in Queenstown. Qualitative interviews with tourism business operators in Queenstown provide important information regarding the challenges faced by those in the tourist trade, and offer unique insight into this sector's perceptions of what seasonality means to them. Two fundamental queries in this research are:

> (1) Whether and/or how seasonality is perceived by operators as a concern for the tourism business sector of Queenstown, and;
>
> (2) What policies and/or strategies have been adopted by operators in the major business sectors to ensure their success and longevity.

A constant but controversial theme in seasonality literature is that the success and sustainability of any particular destination's tourism industry is limited by the influence of seasonality. Various researchers believe seasonality to have a positive impact on an area, while others believe it causes a negative impact. Research conducted during the course of this thesis sought to illuminate this theme from the perspective of the tourism business operator; i.e., how do Queenstown businesses perceive seasonality and did they believe it restricted the success of their business? Understanding the perception of the business owner and operator with respect to the impact of seasonality is crucial to determining the effectiveness of strategies

implemented to manage and/or counteract seasonality's negative impacts. While there have been various researchers who focused on seasonality (Butler 1994; Ball 1998; Baum and Hagen 1999; Baum and Lundtorp 2000; Jolliffee and Farnsworth 2003; Andriotis and Vaughan 2004; Getz and Nilsson 2004), only a few researchers (Duval 2004) have focussed on an approach specific to a tourism operator's perception of seasonality.

## 1.2 Research Contribution and Goals

It is hoped that the findings presented in this thesis will not only contribute to the current understanding of seasonality as it is presented in literature, but will also delineate the current perceptions and opinions of seasonality as it is understood by people intimately affected by it, i.e., tourism operators. Additionally, it is expected that this integration of academic and practical understanding of seasonality on tourism will reveal the major hurdles that tourism operators are faced with, and hence will provide an information source on the impact of seasonality to refer to, both locally in Queenstown and more generally with respect to the tourism industry, and to use in current and future policy planning, development, and implementation. In order to achieve these goals, three main objectives/themes pertaining to understanding seasonality were investigated in the case study area, including:

> (1) An evaluation of whether the selected operators in the tourism business sector in Queenstown believed that seasonality actually *was* a major concern that impacted the sustainability of the industry;
>
> (2) An examination of what the major issues/concerns were for the selected operators in the tourism sector of Queenstown, if seasonality was *not* perceived as a negative impact on the industry, and what factors (e.g., cultural, historical) may control why seasonality was believed not to be a major concern for business operators, and;
>
> (3) An assessment of the degree to which the selected operators in the tourism business sector actively combat seasonality and implement proactive strategies to manage the effects of seasonality, which may be exacerbated by increased tourism development.

## 1.3 Study Area – Queenstown

Queenstown was determined to be an ideal case study area to evaluate seasonality particularly when factors such as distance, cost, and time were considered. The distance from Queenstown to Dunedin (where the researcher of this thesis resided

at the time of the study) was easily commutable. The costs of travel, conducting the research, and accommodations in Queenstown fit within the budget of the study. Moreover, the time required to conduct the research and travel to the case study area was less, compared to other potential areas in the North Island of New Zealand or even outside New Zealand.

Queenstown represents a community that actively pursues tourism and has a well-established, multifaceted, and successful tourism business sector. Collectively these characteristics provided an ideal setting to investigate the perceptions of seasonality held by tourism business operators and managers. Additionally, on a national level, seasonality in New Zealand is an issue that is increasingly recognised as having a major influence on tourism and its sustainability. Therefore, timing dictated that data be collected to provide current information on the impact of seasonality in one of the major tourist destinations in New Zealand, which would then hopefully provide a vantage point from which to observe nationwide trends.

For tourists visiting the southern parts of Otago, Queenstown conveys images of great beauty through dramatic and picturesque scenes. To increase the attractiveness of New Zealand to tourists, the New Zealand tourism industry regularly provides images of Queenstown to international tourist markets, hoping to lure tourists based on Queenstown's natural beauty (Queenstown City Council 2002; New Zealand Regional Tourism Forecast 2008). New Zealand considers Queenstown a 'public gem'; it offers diverse and attractive geographical features and abundant outdoor recreational and leisure experiences for tourists, such as skiing, mountain biking, bungee jumping, tramping, or rafting (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment 1997; New Zealand Official Yearbook 2002). Due to Queenstown's unique geography and climate, these activities are accessible to tourists all year round. Collier (1994, p.247), regards Queenstown as an ideal area for a diverse range of tourists to come to: "Queenstown has become a cornerstone in the national promotional strategy of New Zealand in an attempt to capture both the traditional sightseeing passive visitor as well as those interested in more active pursuits."

The balance of this chapter will provide an overview of Queenstown, the sample area selected for this thesis, as it shows evidence of seasonal tourism and a

robust selection of tourism sectors. The chapter will review the region's general concerns and lack of planning, recent history of Queenstown, the emergence of the town as a tourism destination, (1930-1980), the problems of tourism, the beauty and the unknowns of modern-day Queenstown tourism, the council's efforts and community's concerns with regards to their tourism industry, and how Queenstown copes with tourism lows and seasonality. Although scant seasonality literature with regard to Queenstown is available, it is important that the reader understands the history of the area, the challenges, and the resources available to it. Exploring the reality of Queenstown will give the reader insight into Queenstown's relationship with tourism. The results and the discussion of the tourism operators' perceptions of seasonality in Queenstown will be presented in Chapter Four, providing the reader with a current view of seasonality in Queenstown.

## 1.4 Concerns and a Lack of Planning

The people of Queenstown understand the profit tourism brings to the area. However, they are also aware of the ongoing growth necessary to provide continuous profit. In Queenstown, a lack of planning was a real concern in the 1980s. By 1997, the people of the area suggested that "tourism [growth], over-development, over commercialisation" and "no long term vision for future development" could terminate the success of Queenstown (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment 1997, p.62-64). The people of Queenstown also believe that essential services and infrastructure are a necessary part of the planning to ensure the success of Queenstown (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment 1997, p.62-64). One question that remains is how the Queenstown tourism industry, which includes the tourism business sector, combats seasonal lows and still stays competitive. Queenstown "depends almost entirely on visitors for its livelihood, with an estimated 90% to 95% of the community relying on tourism either directly or indirectly" (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment 1997, p.A69). Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) believes the tourism industry of New Zealand is headed for a downturn (Otago Daily Times 2008). A tourism operator named Daw Hawkey believes his tourism business is going to be dealing with hard times ahead, "result[ing] in a summer like the industry had never seen before" (Otago Daily Times 2008).

## 1.5 Queenstown History

### 1.5.1 Queenstown's Tourism Destination Emerges

Located on the South Island of New Zealand, Queenstown was named after Queen Victoria, as it was viewed by the miners as being "fit for a queen" (Anonymous). One may say tourism started to seep into Queenstown a few years prior to 1920 (Eichardt's Private Hotel 2005). Between 1912 and 1923, a passenger steamer, bus service, and automobile service, such as the Mount Cook Motor Service, were the modes of transportation to and from Queenstown (Eichardt's Private Hotel 2005). With reliable transportation links in place, the area of Queenstown began to draw well-known individuals, including members of parliament and top bureaucrats, to its remarkable scenery and hospitable accommodations, like the Coronation Baths, which were opened by the Minister of Tourism to commemorate the coronation of King George V. (Eichardt's Private Hotel 2005; Society of International Railway Travellers 2005).

### 1.5.2 1930-1980

After fifteen years of successful development in the area, the depression of the 1930s caused a major economic lull to spread through Queenstown, which lasted several decades until the development of hotels and motels increased in the sixties and seventies (Eichardt's Hotel 2005). Continuing into the 1980s, Queenstown's major success was due to the growth of tourist attractions and recreation facilities and the continuation of desired accommodation development (Pearce and Cant 1981). In 1981, Pearce and Cant (1981) published a report that discussed the impact development and tourism was having on Queenstown. At that time, they identified employment and development patterns, as well as economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts, as the most notable causes for concern (Pearce and Cant 1981).

Prior to the major increase of tourism development in the late seventies and early eighties, Queenstown was an area of weekend houses, business owners, and a residential senior community (Pearce and Cant 1981). As development increased during this period in Queenstown, residents and seniors proceeded to sell their homes and shifted their dwellings to less developed and less expensive areas (Pearce and

Cant 1981). In addition, it was at this time in Queenstown that significant employment possibilities and services became available to locals (Market Economics Limited 2003), and outsiders were persuaded to come to Queenstown in hopes of a financially successful future (Pearce and Cant 1980).

### 1.5.3 The Problems of Tourism

According to Pearce and Cant (1981), seasonality was not an issue for Queenstown in 1980, although the report did not provide any other information to explain why this was so. Further, they reported that residents at that time believed that business owners were not cooperating with or respecting the community of Queenstown through carelessly compromising the landscape and not consulting the residents, which one could argue continues to be a problem today (Pearce and Cant 1981). Pearce and Cant (1981) found that as tourism increased, the problems associated with tourism also increased, as locals felt they could not afford to participate in leisure activities or provide spending money for their children, and transportation was causing congestion during peak season (Pearce and Cant 1981, p. 25). The individuals interviewed for their report wanted to ensure the future and stability of the environment of Queenstown and believed that the only way to improve Queenstown was through an "alert and caring public" (Pearce and Cant 1981, p.25). In spite of the concerns voiced by local residents, overall these residents still desired the expansion of Queenstown and indicated they understood that they would bear all the negative and positive impacts that would come to Queenstown so long as the development would be gradual enough to allow them to adapt to the changes (Pearce and Cant 1981, p.25). As previously mentioned, it is important to consider past concerns and planning issues, as it will provide insight into Queenstown's ongoing relationship with tourism.

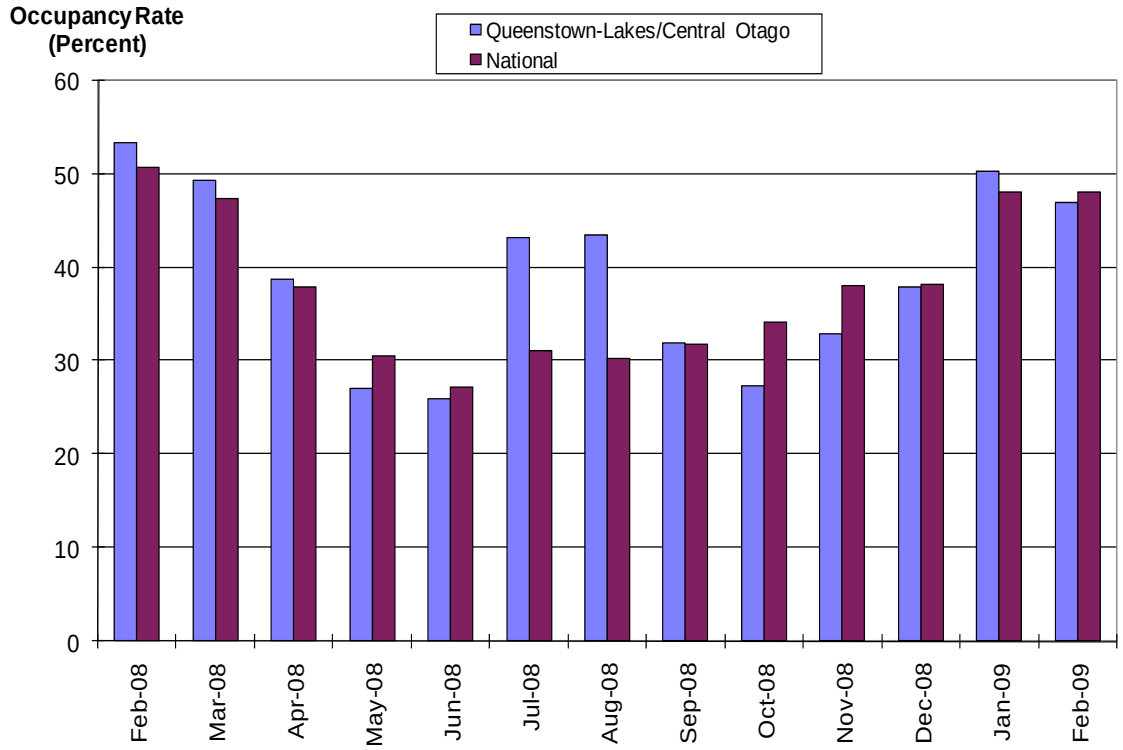
## 1.6 The Beauty and the Unknowns of Modern Day Queenstown Tourism

Queenstown is known as the adventure capital of the world (Collier 1994), with "a large part of Queenstown's economy [still] dependent on tourism" (Market Economics Limited 2003, p.30). The locals consider its representation as an "alpine village" as "essential to the tourism industry" of Queenstown (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment 1997**,** p.A81). The area is home to high-priced properties and encompasses a range of activities for visitors "including

bungee-jumping, skiing, rafting, jet boat rides and hiking (Bradley 2000, p.110; New Zealand Regional Tourism Forecast 2008; Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1997; New Zealand Official Yearbook 2002). The landscape, beauty, outdoor activities, and relaxation are various reasons tourists are attracted to Queenstown (Tourism Research Council N/A; New Zealand Regional Tourism Forecasts 2008).

According to the literature, tourists are interested in exploring areas that have an "unspoiled nature" (Tourism Research Council; New Zealand Tourism Board 1993, p.4). However, the lack of control over the growth or stagnation of the tourism sector is considered a major issue not only for those involved directly in tourism but also for all small business owners. Although Queenstown wants to sustain tourism as a main part of the year-round economy, tourism in the area is not year-round but seasonal. No stranger to diversity, Queenstown prepares for "seasonality variation" throughout the year (Lumsdon 2002). In addition, according to the recent results of the Accommodations Survey (Statistics New Zealand 2009), tourism in Queenstown-Lake/Central Otago is beginning to experience the negative impact of the downturn in the global economy (see Figure 1). The decreasing occupancy rates could cause unforeseen seasonal variations of tourism in the Queenstown-Lakes/Central Otago area. Prior to this recent release of information, Queenstown had been experiencing growth with no discernible decrease in tourism (Statistics New Zealand 2009).

FIGURE 1. Overall Occupancy Rates
Queenstown/Cent. Otago vs. National - February 2008 to February 2009




Source: Statistics New Zealand 2009, http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/57ED071E-8049-4E22-AF7F-47688271F6EB/0/accommodationsurveymar09hotp.pdf

## 1.7 The Council's Efforts and Communities' Concerns in Queenstown's Tourism Industry

Twenty-seven years after Pearce and Cant (1981) interviewed the locals, it would seem that the same issues still burden Queenstown. Surprisingly, regardless of past uncertainties, the New Zealand Regional Tourism Forecasts report (2008) supports future growth and development of the area, catering to holiday tourists visiting Queenstown as a destination (New Zealand Regional Tourism Forecasts 2008). As growth within Queenstown increases, the Queenstown council is becoming aware of the social pressure from the locals and the need for regulations and policies to secure and maintain the growth for the benefit of Queenstown people. Locals have voiced their concern that maintaining the character of the town is important to them and that they are adamant that Queenstown not further devolve into another Disneyland-type theme park, as some locals have already suggested it has (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1997, p.A81). Frustrated with the government's lack of attention to the area, one Queenstown tour operator

suggested the need for stronger enforcement of guidelines: “The government needs to get the guts to say there are areas where access is not to be permitted, where people can’t go” (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1997, p.A77).

Queenstown council’s efforts to compete as an international destination at an international level have members of the community concerned, since some residents do not agree with the actions of the council having such ambitious plans, referring to it as a “bureaucratic busybody” (Field 2005, p.06). The report entitled “Tomorrow’s Queenstown Vision, Issue and Directions” (Queenstown City Council 2002) demonstrates that Queenstown has had emerging marketing ideas and has attempted to stay attractive to all types of tourists, desiring a balance of tourism. However, to commit to the progressive trend of demanding national and international markets, there is a need for money, but adequate funding is not available. Therefore, the report states that development is not feasible until there is real funding to support these opportunities and only through transportation and road improvement, guided infrastructure development, and the volunteer service of planners would Queenstown have a chance to develop to meet the present demand (Queenstown City Council 2002). Hall (2001, p.142) claims: “There is a real pressure for destinations [such as Queenstown] to stay competitive with other global destinations” and that there are “substantial pressures on the provision of tourism infrastructure and the ability of destinations to adapt to the demands of international tourism.” Edwards and Murphy (1992, p.36) suggest, “costs need to be identified and dealt with before profit.”

On a larger scale, The New Zealand Tourism Board and New Zealand Tourism Industry Association in 1996 published a tourism guide examining the environmental issues closely identified with New Zealand tourism. The resource management guide was intended to provide the tourism sector with up-to-date information on strategies for tour operators, developers, and the industry as a whole. The guide was to be utilised at a regional or district level within the tourism sector to ensure a sustainable and functional environment for the natural environment and the industry (The New Zealand Tourism Board and New Zealand Tourism Industry Association 1996).

## 1.8 How Queenstown Copes with Tourism Lows and Seasonality

Like all destinations that deal with seasonality, one may argue that problems arise primarily during periods when tourism is low and profits of the businesses are minimal (Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff 2005). There is little academic literature available to explore this phenomenon in Queenstown, and most of the reports pertaining to Queenstown or to areas close to Queenstown address planning and development only; the reports that did mention seasonality were out-of-date and/or touched on it only briefly. It is therefore central to carry out a study to understand how tourism operators confront tourism lows and losses caused by seasonality.

## 1.9 Thesis Outline

The thesis is arranged into five chapters and related appendices. Chapter Two provides a literature overview of research on seasonality and the areas of tourism associated with seasonality. Specifically, it outlines the current and historical perceptions of the effects of seasonality, particularly concerning small and medium-sized tourist communities. Chapter Three outlines the rationale and method of data collection. The concepts of sample size and selection are addressed, in addition to documenting the process of conducting a semi-structured interview. Chapter Four presents the results of the semi-structured interviews. The four themes that emerged (staffing, infrastructure, monetary/management of business, and seasonal peaks) are based on the perceptions of Queenstown tourism operators and represent frontline concerns the operators have due to seasonality. The information from the interviews is used to characterise 'sector-specific' ideas and perceptions of seasonality and its impact, including correlations among sectors. Chapter Four concludes with a discussion outlining some of the key implications of the data, including the importance of assessing historical and cultural controls that counteract some of the negative effects of seasonality in small tourist communities. Chapter Five summarises the main contributions and conclusions of the research and concludes with recommendations of how the findings may be used for future policy development.

# CHAPTER TWO

# Literature Review

The central research objective of this thesis is to explore seasonality from the perspective of the tourism operator. This approach requires a thorough understanding of what seasonality is, as well as the core issues relating to how government, investors, and the tourism industry, including the indicator business sectors, work within the confines of sustainable seasonality. Successful and objective research into the causes, characteristics, and implications of seasonality requires a comprehensive understanding of current and historical perceptions of seasonality as it pertains to tourism. The aim of this chapter is thus to highlight the key themes and factors relating to seasonality and how seasonality influences tourism.

Following a brief review of the most commonly understood definitions of seasonality and current and historical perceptions of seasonality in tourism, the discussion will focus on general concepts relating to seasonality and the themes considered most relevant to investigating seasonality in relation to the Queenstown, New Zealand tourism industry. The general themes and topics to be addressed are: (i) the positive and negative effects of seasonality in tourism; (ii) the role of environmental change in significantly altering "natural seasonality" and its subsequent impact on tourism, and; (iii) proactive solutions implemented by business, government and investors to counteract the negative impacts of seasonality and promote a long-term, sustainable tourism industry. As literature that focuses specifically on the effects of seasonality on the New Zealand tourism industry is scant, the following discussion utilises several foreign case study areas chosen based on their similarity to the Queenstown study area, particularly with regard to how seasonality affects the sustainability of the respective tourism sectors.

## 2.1 Seasonality in Tourism – Definitions and General Perceptions

Seasonality can present itself in many different forms. According to Butler (2001, p.5), seasonality occurs as:

> [A] temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, and may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as a number of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admission to attractions.

This section will first offer several definitions of seasonality (institutional and natural) and rotation of peaks, followed by illustrated examples of these definitions. Next, it will summarise the work of leading researchers in the area of tourism seasonality. Finally, outstanding problems within seasonality research will be presented.

The general intention of seasonality research is to explore seasonality's overall effects on the tourism industry, including its negative impact in terms of off-peak season(s) and under-utilisation of capacity (Hartman 1986). BarOn (1975), Lundtorp (2001) and Hartmann (1986) are the principal researchers in this field. Their work has provided a fundamental framework outlining what seasonality is and why the effects of seasonality can be considerable on smaller tourist centres such as Queenstown.

A constant, yet contentious, theme in seasonality literature is that the success and sustainability of any particular destination's tourist industry is limited by the influence of seasonality. Seasonal influences include natural (weather-induced) seasonality and institutional seasonality (fluctuations dictated by holidays and school breaks) (BarOn 1975; Hartmann 1986). According to Duval (2004, p.336):

> [T]he issue remains whether seasonality is universally seen as problematic or whether some businesses and operations are willing to forfeit year-round development efforts in favour of a more seasonal attraction mix that suits their own lifestyle patterns.

### 2.1.1 Seasonality – Towards a Definition

Though its definition is still in dispute (Hinch et al. 2000), there is little argument over the importance of seasonality and its impact on tourism. A working definition of seasonality would include the two main components of natural and institutional seasonality, discussed below (BarOn 1975).

*2.1.1.1 Seasonality: Institutional Seasonality vs. Natural Seasonality*

After researching the topic for over twenty years, BarOn concluded that seasonality has specific "monthly fluctuations which recur each year with similar timing and intensity" (BarOn 1975, p.6), and can be divided into two distinct components: natural and institutional. Natural seasonality pertains to environmental influences such as temperature, rainfall, snow, and daylight, all of which affect the actions or activities of individuals (BarOn 1975), whereas institutional seasonality occurs due to religious, cultural, ethnic, and social factors (Baum and Lundtorp 2001). Applied practically, institutional seasonality denotes a set period during which individuals go on holiday during the year, such as school holidays (Spring Break/Summer Holiday) and religious holidays (i.e., Christmas, Easter) (Baum and Lundtorp 2001). In New Zealand, the Holiday Act 2003 (replacement of the Holiday Act of 1981) is an example of an imposed law that can facilitate institutional seasonality (Parliament Counsel Office 2008). The Holiday Act is intended to promote balance between work and other aspects of employees' lives and, to that end, to provide employees with minimum entitlements to the following:

> (a) annual holidays [entitlement to 4 weeks] to provide the opportunity for rest and recreation;
> (b) public holidays for the observance of days of national, religious, or cultural significance;
> (c) sick leave to assist employees who are unable to attend work because they are sick or injured, or because someone who depends on the employee for care is sick or injured, and;
> (d) bereavement leave to assist employees who are unable to attend work because they have suffered a bereavement.
>
> (Parliamentary Counsel Office 2008)

According to BarOn (1975), understanding and improving awareness of the economic importance and patterns of seasonality can provide insight into the tourism industry and appropriately facilitate the industry's services. To understand seasonality, one must understand the rotation of peaks that are often associated with it.

*2.1.1.2 Rotation of Peaks*

The rotation of peaks is a common occurrence for the tourism industry due to the irregular nature of seasonality. The rotation of peaks (or, more specifically, when

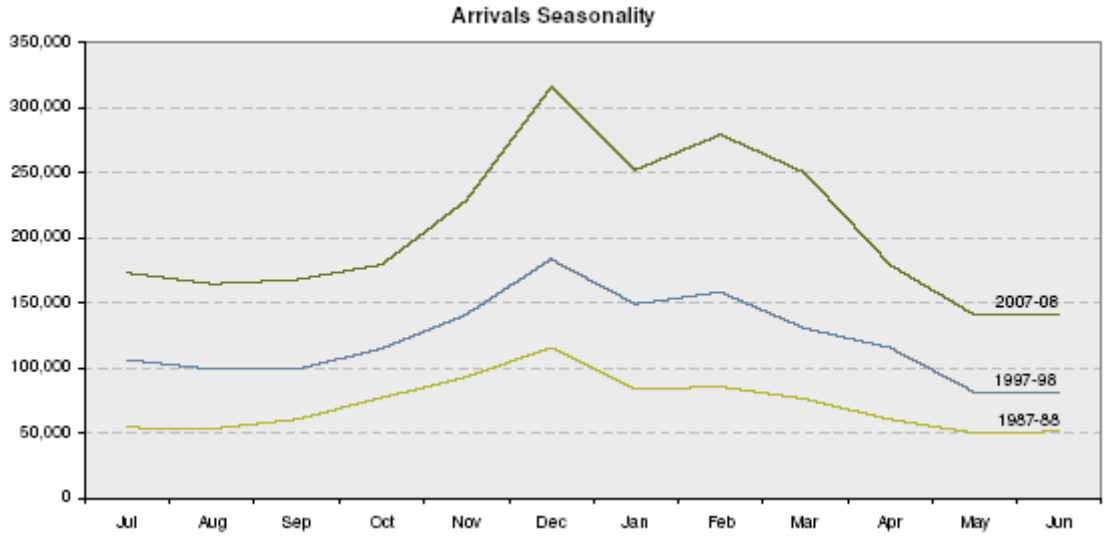
peaks turn into troughs) can challenge a business's sustainability and cause frustration for residents and tour operators alike, as "the presence of seasonality means supply [adjustment] has to be made for the changing demand during the year" (Mak 2004, p.12). This forces businesses to focus on minimising financial spending during the troughs to sustain the life of business until the peak season returns to the area. In an attempt to deal with seasonality, some operators might close their business or, as with transport operators such as air, shuttle, and bus lines, divert their routes to another area with stronger business potential (Mak 2004, p.12). Tourism business sectors the world over have to deal with challenges related to high seasonality peaks.

The Mediterranean Basin, for example, has revamped the focus of the area to decrease seasonal overload due to the increase of congestion (Boissevain and Theuma 1989) and has encouraged spring and winter activities with a focus on quality service and hotel infrastructure for the area (Horwath and Horwath 1989; Markwick 2001). Similarly, tourism operators in New Zealand have to deal with the peaks and troughs of seasonality of the international visitor arrivals. For example, the international visitor arrivals, seen in Figure 2, illustrate these patterns of seasonality from 1987-1988 and 2007-2008. According to the Ministry of Economic Development of New Zealand (2008), it is critical for the tourism industry to be resourceful and durable if it is to weather the potential expected impacts of a down-turned global economy. The Treasury of New Zealand has reported that 2009 arrivals are low and could continue to decrease due to the A-H1N1 swine flu virus (Treasury Board). According to the Treasury of New Zealand (2009):

> Short-term visitor arrivals fell 0.5% in March, after rising 2.9% in February, to be 3.6% lower in the year ended March 2009 than in the preceding March year. Business and holiday arrivals were down around 7% in the year ended March, while arrivals to visit relatives rose 1%. The emergence of the swine flu virus poses a risk to international travel and, given the very weak state of most of our trading partners, arrivals will probably continue to head lower.

The tourism operators of New Zealand have developed personal coping strategies to deal with the diverseness of the tourism industry when faced with peaks rotation. The impact of the dynamics that affect seasonality in Queenstown will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

FIGURE 2. Arrivals Seasonality in New Zealand




Source: Ministry of Economic Development (2008)
http://www.med.govt.nz/templates/MultipageDocumentTOC 40295.aspx

### 2.1.2 Brief Introduction to Leading Researchers in Seasonality

The leading researchers in seasonality related to tourism include: BarOn (1975), Butler (1994; 2001), Butler and Mao (1997), Baum (1999), and Baum and Lundtorp (2001). BarOn (1975) suggests that seasonality is an action that is predictable, causing spontaneous periods of low or high tourism levels (month to month or year to year). Those entities regularly affected by seasonality are destinations, governments, investors, the tourism industry, and tourism business sectors (BarOn 1975). In addition, BarOn (1975) suggests that employment, transportation, foreign trade, and construction are impacted when areas are confronted with seasonality. In the next section, the limitations within the extent of seasonality research will be presented.

### 2.1.3 Limitations within the Extent of Seasonality Research

Despite BarOn (1975) having committed a large amount of time to understanding seasonality, its definition and application remains uncertain. According to Baum and Lundtorp (2001, p.3), the "lack of in-depth longitudinal research in the area" reduces the understanding of the relationship between seasonality and tourism. Indeed, aside from BarOn's (1975) study, little long-term research has been undertaken to gain an understanding of seasonality (Baum and Lundtorp 2001). Butler (1994) comments that knowledge about seasonality has been built not on empirical research but on assumption and supposition. Moreover, research carried out thus far has been at a regional or national level, and has involved mostly cold-weather

destinations such as Denmark, Ireland, England, Canada, and New Zealand (Butler 1994). Consequently, the depth of seasonality is not fully understood, according to Hartman (1986). In New Zealand, the lack of research relating to seasonality and tourism is correspondingly minimal. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to investigate the perceptions of seasonality held by tourism operators of Queenstown, a popular tourism destination in New Zealand. In the next section, the positive and negative effects of seasonality on tourism will be addressed.

## 2.2 Effects of Seasonality on Tourism

Within the literature, the effects of seasonality on tourism are usually identified as either positive or negative. Generally speaking, most researchers (e.g., BarOn 1975; Soesilo and Mings 1987; Baum and Lundtorp 2001; Butler 2001; Koenig and Bischoff 2004; Hinch and Jackson 2000) focus on the negative impacts of tourism seasonality, while only a small number of researchers (e.g., Butler 1994; Harmann 1986) focus on the positive implications. In this section, both the positive and negative effects of seasonality on tourism will be discussed. The first section will address the positive effects of seasonality specific to tourism operators, while the second section will address the negative effects of seasonality specific to tourism operators and the resultant impact on employees, communities, and peripheral areas.

### 2.2.1 Positive Effects of Seasonality on Tourism

According to Mathieson and Wall (1982), seasonality can be beneficial for the tourism industry as it increases the labour market competition within seasonal sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and fishery. Seasonality can and does receive high reviews among tourism business owners, often suggesting seasonality can provide a break from the high season of tourism (Goulding, Baum and Morrison 2004; Duval 2004). For example, seasonal business can mean more freedom for tour operators, particularly during the low season, as they can use the seasonal lull in business to take their own vacations and to update and improve their business operations (Goulding, Baum and Morrison 2004)

### 2.2.2 Negative Effects of Seasonality on Tourism

#### *2.2.2.1 Effects on Tourism Operators*

According to Duval (2004), New Zealand tourism operators in Central Otago felt that their lack of tourism growth was due to seasonality. In addition, the operators believed that their businesses suffered more than others: "The perception, to some extent [was] that, when compared with their own business, other operations and businesses have fewer problems with respect to seasonal fluctuations" (Duval 2004, p.335-336). According to a New Zealand Workforce Report (2004), the accommodations sector is significantly impacted by seasonality, as it relies heavily on international and domestic tourism. As a result, the demands of the high season regularly place undue strains on accommodation services and infrastructures (Murphy 1985).

#### *2.2.2.2 Effects on Employees*

To understand the negative impact of seasonality, it is important to understand how seasonality affects tourism destinations and how tourism operators are dealing with these effects on employees. In the seasonal economy of most destinations, employees are given remuneration on a weekly or bi-weekly basis; however, they are also affected by unsought problems that come with seasonal employment. These problems include lack of job security (meaning no guarantee of employment from one season to the next), difficulties in obtaining training or employment-related medical benefits, and unsatisfactory housing and working conditions (UNEP Tourism 2005; Behringer and Kiss 2004; Workforce 2004). The lack of support tourism employees receive impacts negatively both on the tourism experience and on the service provided (Behringer and Kiss 2004). Clark (1981) also suggests that seasonality can cause tourist destinations to be regularly confronted with the stress of issues including employment and quality of service. The disparity between the "high and low seasons causes fluctuations like increases in wage rates during the high season and reductions in employee hours and increases in the unemployment rates during the low season, or they are laid off and the and unemployment rates increase" (Sorensen 1999, p.75). According to the 2004 New Zealand Workforce Report (2004), tour operators and the tourism industry are aware there is a demand for permanent full-time positions in the field, though solutions have not been readily apparent.

Due to seasonal lows, the loss of ongoing employment and career development can force a seasonally employed community to seek assistance from the government in the form of social assistance such as unemployment and welfare benefits (Witt 1991). The tourism industry could avoid these problems if destinations and the industry itself were more diligent in modifying policies, marketing, and operations (Baum and Lundtorp 2001; Butler 1994; Koenigh-Lewis and Bishcoff 2005). However, according to Duval (2004, p.327): “the sheer task of reorienting a locality from a seasonal destination to a year-round destination should not be underestimated.” Specifically, it is believed that concerns arising from seasonality need to be addressed before an area or resort can evolve into a year-round destination. Such concerns include employment (available year round to full-time/part-time staff), infrastructure (to reflect a year-round tourism destination), marketing, and policies (that reflect a year-round destination vs. existing seasonal destination) (Butler 2001; Baum and Lundtorp 2001).

Ismert and Petrick (2004) were among the first researchers to gather concrete data applicable to seasonal employment. Based on the data collected from first- and second-year seasonal ski-industry workers, the researchers discovered that these employees had different motives for employment. First-year employees required social support (reinforcement/direction) from fellow employees, while returning workers responded to good benefits and wages as key motivating factors to return the following year (Ismert and Petrick 2004; Ball 1988). Overall, Ismert and Petrick’s (2004) findings suggest that seasonal employment is attractive to an employee only until permanent work with higher wages becomes available. The delay and mishandling of these employment components persist as investors, destinations, and governments focus instead on the short-term financial benefit that tourism provides.

*2.2.2.3 Effects on Communities*

In situations that combine inexperience and impracticality “people [within a community of a destination] may also be disadvantaged by seasonal strains on community services and infrastructure" (Amelung, Nicholls and Viner 2007, p.287). For example, if too large an infrastructure is built to accommodate tourists, and the low seasons outweigh the peak seasons, the resultant loss in revenue can make the destination unprofitable for small businesses and investors (Amelung, Nicholls and

Viner 2007). Robinson (1976), BarOn (1975) and Murphy (1985) agree that tourism areas affected by seasonality can be devastated by misplaced ambition, as tourism is not beneficial for every destination. BarOn (1975) claims seasonality can cause diverse negative effects on destinations or areas of tourism, such as spontaneous periods of activity and not the outcome of long-term year-round tourism. Murphy (1985) suggests that such examples are found in destinations experiencing high peaks for many weeks without any hint of low peaks. In addition, Robinson (1979) asserts that while seasonality issues are not always similar from area to area, most areas do experience problems such as inadequate employment schemes, staggering social programs, devastating investments, and exhausted government support (Simpson 2001). To counter seasonality, Commons and Page (2001) contend that adjustments should be made to employment, cost, and facilities.

*2.2.2.4 Effects on Peripheral Areas Prone to Seasonality*

Peripheral geographical areas are destinations considered rustic and bare with minimal resources (Brown and Hall 1999). Seasonality is an ongoing issue known to affect peripheral destinations (Butler 1994; Hinch and Hickey 1996). In remote areas, the presence of tourism demand due to seasonality is smaller than in larger populated areas (Brown and Hall 1999). Due to this lack of demand, these areas are regularly exposed to economic depression, with side effects diminishing investors' profits and depleting social sustainability and a diverse economy.

According to Abler, Adams, and Gould (1971), considering different spatial structures within occupied tourism destinations can make a real difference to the success of a destination. Examples of successful spatial development with controlled seasonality are commonly found in developed areas, such as urban settings, where there is a routine safeguard (strong economy with fewer economy lows) surrounding tourism (Abler, Adams & Gould 1971). According to Morrill and Dormitzer (1979, p.337), "the success of the more populous urban centres arises from "the futurist view of planning for the natural earth and human activities." Therefore, it is important to provide a sustainable, long-term, futurist plan for peripheral areas to counter the negative impacts of seasonality. Prideaux (2001) suggests that understanding peripheral areas and the amount of usage space necessary for tourism can complement the dynamics of peripheral areas and the associated functions of tourism such as

transportation, development, and services. Improving peripheral areas could limit seasonality or even allow such areas to design a tourism industry reflecting their geographic uniqueness.

Hall and Muller (2004) suggest the complexity of peripheral areas arises in part from the values peripheral residents hold. Therefore, in order to navigate a successful and practical approach to tourism in peripheral areas, it would be useful to create long-term plans that reflect both the mindset of the residents and the landscape of the destination. According to Bodlender et al. (1991), it is imperative that residential communities pre-determine tourism guidelines and examine research findings that provide the right solutions for the area, as the tourism industry should mirror the community it is part of (Bodlender et al. 1991). Too often, destinations decide to take on a tourism development that is well above their infrastructure and financial ability. The appraisal of an area embarking on tourism should be represented with consideration, education and policies, employment accomplishments, and overall fairness in tourism ethics and business (World Tourism Organization 2005). Such measures are ways that destinations and tourism areas can conduct tourism ventures that are reflective of their area.

## 2.3 Increasing Natural Seasonality: Environmental Changes and Tourism

As mentioned in Section 2.2, seasonality impacts tourism in many ways, including the positive and negative effects on tourism operators, employees, communities, infrastructure, and peripheral areas. In this section, the increase of seasonality (namely, natural seasonality) due to environmental changes such as climate change and global warming will be discussed in light of how it is playing a major role in changing typical tourism patterns across the world. Natural seasonality is generally defined as “the regular temporal variations in natural phenomena over a course of a year, particularly those associated with rainfall, snowfall, temperature, daylight, etc.” (Hickey 1998, p.3). This section is comprised of three sub-sections: Changing of Tourism Patterns Across the Globe; Global Warming and Climate Change Effects on Natural and Institutional Seasonality; and, Temperature, Extreme Weather Changes, and Climate Uncertainties.

### 2.3.1 Changing Global Tourism Patterns

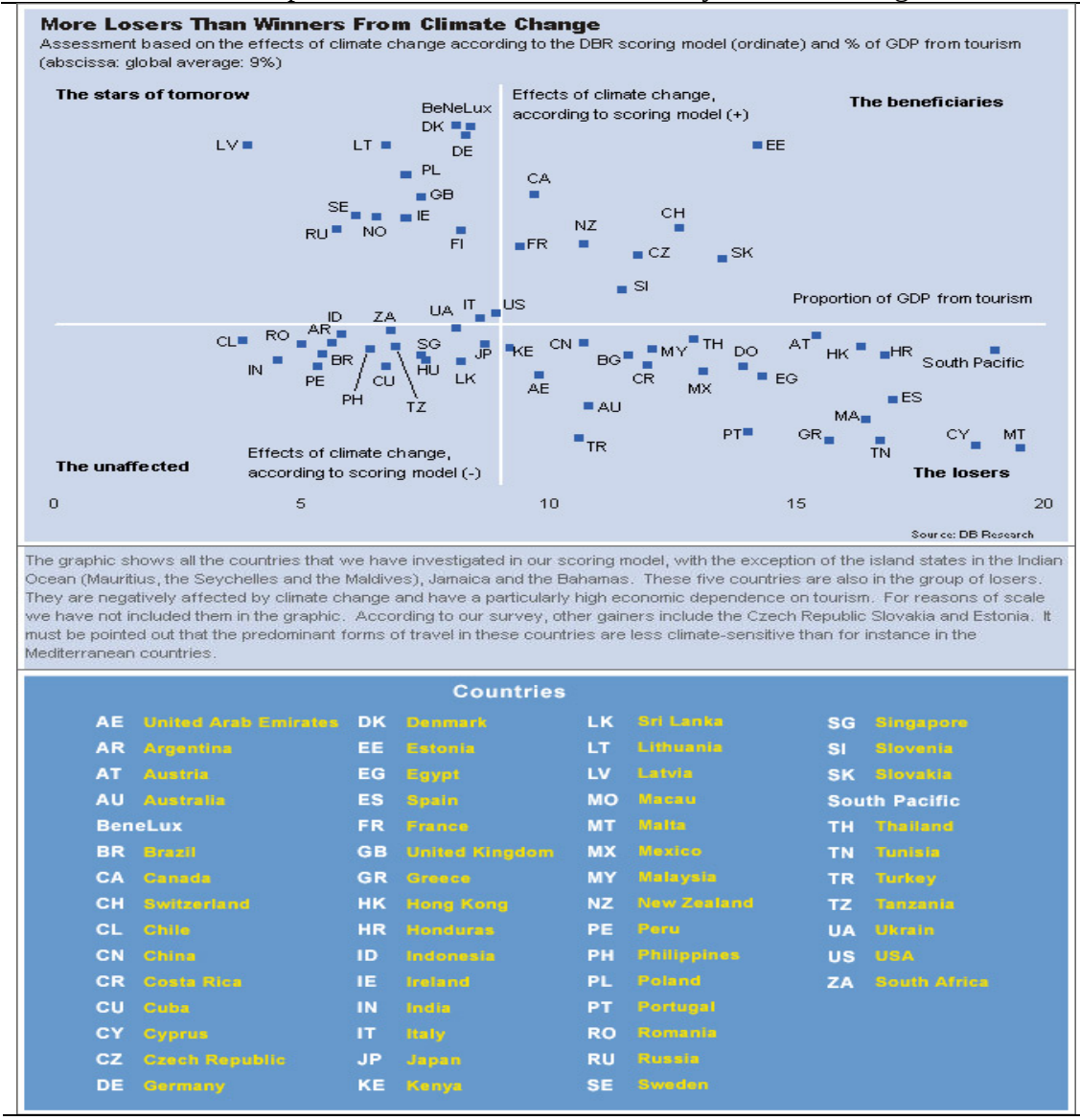
Tourism operators and the tourism industry are aware that the lengths of seasons are changing from year to year. The problem is how tourism operators as well as destinations can manage seasonality-impacted tourism caused by this evolving environmental problem. Scott and Jones (2006) conducted a study to develop management and policy frameworks to support the expected increase in natural seasonality. According to Scott and Jones (2006, p. 42), "natural seasonality is a defining characteristic impact on the length and quality of recreation seasons (supply) as well as visitation levels (demand). Any changes in the length and quality of operating seasons (natural seasonality) would have considerable implications for the economic sustainability of recreation and tourism". Moreover, any changes in length and quality of tourism and recreation operating seasons brought about by changes in the climate "would have considerable implications for visitation" (Scott and Jones 2006, p.42).

Kreutzwiser (1989, p.29) claims that "climate and weather conditions have led to the appearance of distinct seasonal variations in sport tourism visitation in a significant number of mountain destinations areas across the globe." The average season length for winter recreation is projected to decrease under a warm climate (Scott and Jones 2006, p.44). However, "some of the potential loses in visitation would be compensated by expanded opportunities for warm weather" (Scott and Jones 2006, p.44). Since tourism is often dependent on climatic conditions, researchers are aware that climate change will, in fact, impact tourism (Scott and Jones 2006, p.44).

In response, researchers are now beginning to explore the expected impacts of climate change – namely, how it will change seasonality and tourism visitation (Scott and Jones 2006). Tourism operators and the tourism industry as a whole are also dealing with climate-change-related impacts such as shorter winter seasons for outdoor recreation (ice climbing, skiing, and ice fishing) and longer summer seasons for water sports and outdoor recreation (hiking, kayaking, and cycling). Depending on destination locations, Ehmer and Heymann (2008) believe that climate change will cause more tourism in some areas and less tourism in others. However, according to Ehmer and Heymann (2008), climate changes produce more losers than winners.

Figure 3 shows four different sections: the stars of tourism, the beneficiaries, the unaffected, and the losers (Ehmer and Heymann 2008). A large number of countries were used in this study to illustrate the impact of climate change on tourism; however, the areas to be considered in this text are a sample and do not demonstrate the full scope of the graph. According to findings from Ehmer and Heymann's study, some countries considered to be positively affected by tourism (the beneficiaries) were New Zealand and Canada (Ehmer and Heymann 2008), while places that would be affected negatively (the losers) were, for instance, Mexico, the South Pacific, and Australia (Ehmer and Heymann 2008). The unaffected areas included Chile and Japan, while the "stars of tomorrow" were countries such as Russia and Sweden (Ehmer and Heymann 2008). These forecasts are key indicators for countries, destinations, and the tourism industry in general, since being aware of the impact of the expected changes on tourism enables economies to modify policies and procedures and, most importantly, to practice new strategies to prepare for expected impacts, negative or positive, due to climate change (Ministry of Economic Development 2009). As Scott and Jones (2006) assert, such awareness creates a framework for managers and tourism industry stakeholders to work within.

FIGURE 3. Future Expected Tourism Areas Affected By Climate Change




Source: Ehmer and Heymann 2008, http://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/DBR_INTERNET_EN PROD/PROD0000000000222943.pdf

This information is helpful for managers to implement strategies and devise infrastructure to mirror the change of natural seasonality caused by climate change and also to prepare for institutional seasonality related to climate change. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2003), the economic gain from tourism has been at the expense of the natural world, local identity, and traditional cultures. It is therefore imperative that planning and management be highly effective in order to address and be accountable for its industry (Inskeep 1991).

According to Butler (1994, p.12), “the lengths of the seasons [will] change due to global warming and other aspects of climatic change,” suggesting that the environmental break in the low season will be an asset to the environment and perhaps to the tourism industry as a whole. Scott and Jones (2006) studied the impact of climate change on Canadian parks. The study concluded that climate change is affecting both the parks and the number of visits to the parks. Based on their research, Scott and Jones (2006) believe that Canadian parks will experience more visitors in the future. These conclusions were drawn after determining that tourism will increase due to warm weather caused by climate change. Canadian parks are in the beginning stages of improving the framework to take into account the impacts of climate change (Welsh 2005; Scott and Jones 2006).

Hartmann (1986, p.12) agrees that climate can be a contributing factor affecting tourism. He posits that climate can force tourists to gravitate to certain geographical areas. This notion is valuable, as earth changes such as global warming will have an impact on the seasons, tourism, transportation, accommodations, services, restaurants, travel, outdoor recreation, activities, and, undoubtedly, seasonality (Butler 1994; Black 2004). Patmore (1983, p.70) states, “one of the most unyielding of constraints is imposed by climate.” Equally, de Freitas (2005, p.38) warns that if nothing is done to prepare for climate changes, “the size and appeal of the [geographical location] zone will not necessarily change. Rather, the geographical location of the zone will shift” due to the change of the climate. Such geographical shifts will also affect animals in the areas and will influence where tourists decide to vacation, depending on their personal interests. Thus, global environmental changes will directly affect seasonality, which in turn will affect how and where tourists vacation.

### 2.3.2. Global Warming and Climate Change Effects on Natural Seasonality

As mentioned above, natural seasonality is impacted by the environment. However, institutional seasonality is likewise impacted by climate change. According to Amelung, Nicholls and Viner (2007, p.285), “tourism is a climate-dependent industry, and many destinations owe their popularity to their pleasant climates during traditional holiday seasons.” It is further suggested by Amelung, Nicholls and Viner (2007, p.285) that the shift in peaks “will depend greatly on the flexibility

demonstrated by institutions and tourists as they react to climate change, with substantial implications for both spatial and temporal redistribution of tourism activities." The snow seasons in the colder climates are dwindling, resulting in shorter winter resort seasons. Warmer climates are experiencing either higher temperatures, where tourists are staying longer or being exposed to more heat, or lower temperatures, with tourists shortening their visit length (European Snowsports Markets and Destinations 2002). Areas experiencing extreme temperature variation are defenceless, as climate change is, for the most part, beyond the control of the resorts and of winter destinations, which are now being viewed as global concerns within the tourism industry.

On the following page is a modified sample (Scott and Jones 2006, p.2) of direct impacts of natural seasonality caused by climate variability. Scott and Jones (2006) claim that seasonality impacts the outdoor oriented activities' normal pattern for recreationists whether the activities are in the summer, fall, winter, or spring. These examples delineate the impact of climate variability on outdoor recreation and tourism in Canada. Understanding how seasonality is impacted by climate can allow managers and stakeholders to put frameworks in place to address seasonality in the future.

TABLE 1. Climate Variability on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism in Canada

| Season/Year | Winter Recreation | Warm Weather Recreation |
|---|---|---|
| 2000-2001 | Blue Mountain Resort (*Collingwood, Ontario*) - Longest ski season in 60 years<br><br>18% *INCREASE* in ski revenues over previous season | N/A |
| 2001-2002 | Above-normal temperatures between Nov 2001 and Feb 2002 delayed the opening of the Rideau Canal Skateway in Ottawa (Ontario) by almost six weeks.<br><br>Shortest skating season (34 days) in 30 years. | Low water levels on the Great Lakes, Ontario ongoing since 1999 contributed complications for marina operators (e.g. inaccessible docks (too high out of the water) and launch ramps (did not reach waterline)).<br><br>Canadian Government funded a $15 million '*Great Lakes Water Level Emergency Response Programme'* for emergency dredging. |
| 2004 | N/A | Unseasonably cool, wet spring and summer in parts of Canada impacted recreation negatively, (e.g. Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, Ontario, 30% fewer daily visitors during peak period). |
| 2004-2005 | Mild, wet winter - negative impact on winter recreation at Whistler-Blackcomb ski resort, British Columbia.<br><br>60% of its ski runs closed before March Break (lack of snow);<br><br>Number of visitors down 14% for 2004/05 season.<br><br>Cross-country skiing, traditionally done in the valley, moved to higher elevations and to accommodate earlier start of mountain biking season. | N/A |
| 2005 | N/A | Record warm summer.<br><br>Increase by 30 % in day trips to Ontario's provincial parks.<br><br>Beach parks experienced largest increase (e.g., Sibbald Point, Sandbanks, and Wasaga Beach provincial parks had 700,000 more person visits in July). |
| 2005-2006 | Large late-winter snowfalls in western Canada.<br><br>Whistler-Blackcomb ski resort extended the ski season into early June. | N/A |

Source: Scott and Jones (2006, p.02)

2.3.3 Temperature, Extreme Weather Changes, and Climate Uncertainties

According to Ratz (2003), as the earth's temperature rises, the tourism business sector and industry as a whole will be affected. The four main areas to be affected, as identified by Ratz, are as follows:

> · Water levels (used for outdoor recreation such as rafting, kayaking and fishing);
> · Winter Oriented Destination (winter skiing and snowmobiling seasons shortened):
> · Summer Oriented Destinations (summer season longer with bike trails and campsites over impacted), and;
> · Affected parks and the ecosystems in these areas (animals' behaviour changes with the possibility of more fires due to repressed areas).
>
> (Ratz 2003)

The temperature of an area can greatly affect "the length of the operation season and the tourist quantities" (Ratz 2003). Commonly, an "adaptive strategy [is] implemented, such as the diversification of activities to ensure seasonality does not disrupt the tourism sector" (Ratz 2003). Seasonal changes due to climate temperature can cause alarm among the travel and tourism industry, further affecting destinations and tourism business sectors and subsequently altering the seasonal demand of tourism.

According to Higham and Hall (2005, p.304), "destinations once commonly associated with images of ideal climate are likely to find this status being eroded due to such things as increasing incidence of unacceptable weather, extreme weather events and changing visitor perceptions and preferences." Due to the increasing temperature of the earth, the earth's ocean levels are rising. The two main reasons the oceans are rising are that water expands as temperatures rise, just as it does when it freezes, and rising temperatures are melting land-based ice, which adds water to the ocean (Washington: Ocean Levels on the Rise 2004). The impacts of rising ocean levels are extensive, causing levels of non-ocean water to increase and dissipate and animal behaviours to change in response to food and water shortages.

## 2.4 Proactive Solutions, Strategies and Policies Implemented to Counteract Negative Impacts of Seasonality

The negative impacts of seasonality are demanding and discouraging to the tourism industry. However the limitations forced upon the industry causes lessons to be learned and the tourism industry to be creative and resourceful through, for instance, more meticulous budgeting and planning. In this section, business, government, and investors' proactive solutions, strategies, and polices implemented to counteract negative impacts of seasonality are presented in an attempt to provide a solution to the negative impacts of a slowing economy on the tourism sector.

### 2.4.1 Business Solutions for a Slow Economy

Business is a tool that can be used to counteract negative seasonality if implemented successfully to create year-round tourism in an area, where desired. Not only does seasonality impose financial frustrations on destinations, but Collier (1994, p.340) claims there are ramifications when the industry's forecasts do not include planning for "over-dependence on tourism, or the over zealousness of a government and or [organisations] to develop the tourism industry." Collier (1994, p. 340) further notes that this "can be accompanied by under-development within other sectors of the economy, such as education, health, manufacturing, and agricultural industries." One way a destination can plan to combat seasonality is to provide conditions (outdoor and indoor settings) and a variety of selections that are desirable for all types of tourists. For example, providing different types of attractions in one central area adds to the convenience and satisfaction for the tourists. Hinch and Jackson (2000, p.99) state that:

> High-altitude destinations may develop climatically controlled leisure centres and shopping areas to provide comfortable conditions for visitors during the winter season. Similarly, artificial snowmaking machines can be used to provide the desired conditions for skiers during what would normally be the shoulders of the natural ski season.

The Central Highlands of Scotland and Indonesia are two examples of tourist zones that demonstrate planned steps taken to minimise the effects of seasonality. According to Baum and Lundtorp (2001), the Central Highlands of Scotland, predominantly a summer tourism area, decided to implement winter activities to

reduce seasonality. As a result, a new seasonal pattern emerged; “as the attractiveness of the destination changed, so [did] [the] pattern of demand” (Baum & Lundtorp 2001, p.110). In Indonesia, employment concerns were solved for areas that experienced low tourist arrivals due to seasonality. To balance out the employees’ low wages and minimal work hours, the Keoladeo National Park Hotel provided their workers with benefits, such as food, clothing, and seasonal accommodation (Goodwin 2003).

### 2.4.2 Government Solutions

#### *2.4.2.1 Solution for a Slow Economy*

During the off-season, governments can be overwhelmed with the negative effects of seasonality and the magnitude of needs of their citizens. Governments are aware of the lack of employment and “[loss] of revenue or reflected as the enforced termination of employment” (Jefferson 1986, p.24). In Atlantic Canada, seasonality is identified annually, and governments have even introduced employment programmes hoping to prolong the tourism season and to encourage new markets to develop (Joliffe and Farnwork 2003). Governments quite often cope with seasonality by encouraging the lowering of prices during the low seasons, thereby encouraging visitors to the area (Jeffrey and Barden 1999). An example of an area affected by the low demand of tourism caused by seasonality is New Zealand. In this country, Collier (1994) claims seasonality “is a factor affecting profitability of New Zealand accommodation within destinations.” For example, accommodations reach full capacity during peak seasons, yet guest stay is minimal during the low seasons (Collier 1994). Addressing seasonality is critical, as it places pressure on the local, provincial, and federal governments, human resource management, employers, employees, and communities. The progress of these areas’ development depends on tourism. New Zealand has been experiencing a decline in accommodations between 2007 and 2008 the total of guest nights has decreased by 4% (The New Zealand Institute 2009).

#### *2.4.2.2 Solutions to Adapt to the Negative Effects of Seasonality*

During the low season(s), a destination or country can be faced with increased financial burdens. Unemployment may be exacerbated and strategies to deal with low

seasons are often nonexistent. In order to deal with the negative impact, creative strategies need to be created, implemented, managed (ongoing), and developed along with the area's evolution. From 1994 to 1999, the Government of Ireland implemented a solution to improve low season slumps, introducing target marketing to appeal to the international market. Tourist products suitable for year-round, high-yield business were also marketed, such as conference sites, and incentive-, quality-, niche- and activity-markets (Kennedy and Deegan 2001). In June 2002, Jimmy Deenihan, spokesperson for arts, sports, and tourism, stated that the seasonal slump of tourism was still seen as a concern, and that "unless the government acts swiftly, jobs in the Irish tourist industry will be lost" (Fine Gael National Press Office 2002). Consequently, the Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism proceeded to appoint The Tourism Policy Review Group, in December 2002. The minister's suggestions were as follows: "Identify the key elements of a strategy, both industry-led and government-led, for the further sustainable development of tourism in Ireland, in the light of the assessment of the performance and economic impact of the sector over the past [ten] years." (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009). In 2003, the group presented a report, *New Horizons*, with the recommended focus for 2003-2012 of tourism in Ireland (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009). The following year in 2004, Tourism Action Plan Implementation Group (TAPIG) was created to implement the recommendations from the *New Horizons* report (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009). In 2006, over three quarters of the recommendations from *New Horizons* were implemented (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009). The minister decided that same year that TAPIG would provide an additional contribution to advise the minister and other departments of the remaining *New Horizons* recommendations and work on other areas that needed to be supported (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009). As of 2009, TAPIG has forwarded additional issues that have arisen since the *New Horizons* report was published (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009). In addition, TAGIP has also provided an update on the progress of the recommendations of *New Horizons* to the Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism (The Department of Art, Sports and Tourism 2009).

As demonstrated above, seasonality affects government policy, but with planning and evolving strategies (creative thinking), seasonality can be managed. Tourism is a product "in a state of change, aging but adjusting to new needs and

markets, partly declining in quality, partly undergoing improvement and renovation, or redevelopment and expansion" (Doswell 1997, p.169 in Higham and Hinch 2001, p.21). There is a growing need for government assistance to facilitate tourism in such areas as "attractions, services, transportation, information, and promotion", as demonstrated from the literature in the above section (Gunn 1994, p. 435). According to Godfrey and Clarke (2000, in Gibson, Willming and Holdnak 2002, p. 21), the active involvement of government is a positive influence on tourism development, which perhaps could minimise seasonality. In the initial stages of tourism development, it is necessary to have the support and backing of the government to sustain and increase the development of tourism for the future of the destination (Bodlender et al. 1991; Bonnick 2000).

*2.4.2.3 Rural Government Solutions*

The strategies and solutions to encourage, plan, develop, implement, and deal with the impacts of tourism can be different from one government to the next. This includes the approach taken by management/decision-makers/investors embarking on, or working towards, evolving tourism in an area, thereby creating solutions. The introduction of tourism is a common tactic used by rural governments for financial salvation (Marshell 2001); however, rural governments address tourism differently from other government areas. While Flognfeldt (2001) found that rural areas were affected by seasonality, they have utilised their surroundings to serve the community more efficiently. To achieve success in rural destinations, Flognfeldt (2001, p.110) suggests that areas faced with seasonality need to "fit different types of tourism production into the seasonal patterns of other productions activities." For instance, he believes every attempt is being made in rural Norway to deal with seasonality, including getting students and migrant workers involved and "developing new products to expand seasons, taking long holidays, getting into export markets, moving away to work or study during the off season" (Flognfeldt 2001, p.110). In addition, Flognfeldt (2001, p.110) contends that individuals confronted with unemployment can mix employment, combining teaching and tourism, and/or agriculture and tourism to turn "negative conditions into good quality solutions in order to sustain employment." Flognfeldt (2001) claims that if destinations are to confront seasonality, an assortment of methods should be used, depending on the destination size, community, and assets available to the area. Both Murphy (1985) and Flognfeldt (2001) advise that to get a

better understanding of seasonality, research should not be restricted to resorts, but instead should include rural areas and/or other tourism areas. Nonetheless, Flognfeldt (2001) surmises that some destinations have no choice but to accept seasonality and the adjustments that comes with it, including changes to public services.

#### *2.4.2.4 Implemented Methods Used To Combat Seasonal Lows*

The Caribbean and Maldives offer two examples of areas where governments have successfully planned and implemented methods to combat their economies' seasonal lows. The Caribbean Government has established five goals aimed at fostering the sustainability and the social and ecological health of the tourism industry as a whole (Duval and Wilkinson 2004). These goals are: to aim more dynamically to attract private sectors; to assist in assembling land and other resources; to involve the people in the planning; to identify and program complementary infrastructure and utility developments; and to establish appropriate zoning laws and ensure adequate land titling and management (Duval and Wilkinson 2004). In the Maldives, the government filters funding into the industry from an established bed tax and from lease rents.

These examples suggest that governments have the opportunity while working with the tourism industry to explore and expand tourism opportunities, contributing to the well-being of their tourism industry (World Tourism Organization 2005). In their attempts to work against seasonality, tourism interests and governments should employ creative business strategies (Flognfeldt 2001). For example, according to Collier (1999), governments need to take a more active role in facilitating foreign tourism investments in New Zealand, as tourism can improve the economy and increase jobs for the area.

### 2.4.3 Investor Solutions

#### *2.4.3.1 Investor Support for Tourism*

Development and planning in tourism is increasing as international and domestic investors view it as an attractive investment. Capital gained from a large-scale tourism industry is becoming a viable way for destinations and businesses to counteract the negative impacts of seasonality. Presented in this section are some

proactive solutions, strategies, and policies implemented to counteract negative impacts of seasonality.

According to Simpson (2001, p.4), the "rapidly changing face of the world-wide tourism industry has generated increasing support for enhanced levels of multiple stakeholder participation in the tourism planning process." However, examining the overall motives of investors and businesses differs from one to the next. Buckley and Papadopoulos (1988, p. 371) suggest "[t]he use of internal markets rather than reliance on external contracts which are often expensive, uncertain, and difficult to control" is seen as a dividend to the investors. Buckley and Papadopoulos (1988) further claim that domestic investments are increasing, therefore becoming more profitable and less risky than international investments. Two examples of tourism investment strategies used by Greece and Bulgaria are worth examining. The examples presented below present the destinations' implemented strategies and policies to counteract seasonality by attracting monetary funds to stabilise the areas.

After World War II, public investment in Greek tourism was used to support commercial facilities thought to stimulate tourism and to encourage private sector investment by increasing confidence in the success of the industry (Buhalis 2001). Today, Greece still sees direct investment in tourism as an important contribution to the economy. These investments ensure profit and growth, demonstrate the productivity of the area, facilitate the development of the people, and promote a feasible direction for the community (Buhalis 2001). In Greece, two incentives and options are in place to attract foreign investors (Buckley and Papadopoulos 1988). The first option includes investment grants, interest-rate subsidies, and extra depreciation community, while the second is non-taxable allowances and extra depreciation community (Buckley and Papadopoulos 1988). Greece claims there is value in offering two options to investors, as "investment incentives encourage investment not only from local business [operators]…but also from foreign investors, including transnational tourist operators" (Buckley and Papadopoulos, 1988, pp.371 and 380).

In 2002, the Bulgarian Tourist Chamber prepared itself for a significant increase in foreign investments, certain that the tourist sector would reach USD140 million that year (Nacheva 2002). Since that time, there has been a concentrated focus

by the government to ensure that Bulgaria offers a standard of tourism that will attract visitors by offering appropriate infrastructure. There is also a concentrated effort being put forth by Bulgaria to entice the interest of investors.

However, investment in tourism is not always the best option. According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (2005), investments can be problematic for destinations, especially in Asian and Pacific regions desiring to develop tourism. The WTO (2005) agrees that without funding, the public sector, tourism facilities, and attraction areas will not be successful. Robson and Robson (2000) suggest that to maintain growth in tourism, it is imperative that tourism operators be responsible for what takes place within the industry and held accountable for their actions. For example, they should be involved in the development of planning and the implementation of new policies that will reinforce the development and sustainability of the tourism economy (Bodlender et al. 1991). The private business sector "depend[s] greatly on investment, planning, and management policies provided by government" (Gunn 1994, p.435). Therefore, is it also critical that operators examine the levels of government, local, regional, national, and international, to ensure that productivity meets their needs within the industry (Bodlender et al. 1991).

#### *2.4.3.2 Seasonality and Investor Cautions*

Commonly in tourism, investment is a large part of the success or failure of an area, resulting in a positive or negative experience for all parties involved. The negative implication of the diversity of services and uncertainty of seasonality increases risks for investors. As there is a high risk of losing investments due to seasonality, investors pay close attention to details including the attractions, the destination, government involvement, and other markets available within the investment to increase and prolong it. As Klem and Rawel (2001, p.141) claim, "Seasonality has demonstrated to investors that tourism is a risky business, as it is seasonal and difficult to raise capital compared with other sectors." Investors who value large profits and reputable portfolios see tourism as an area with little value of returns (Butler 1994). According to Baum & Hagen (1999, p.299), "the seasonal nature of the industry may be blamed for limited investment, especially overseas, and return on investment within the tourism sector."

## 2.5 Encouraging Optimistic Outcomes of Seasonality in the Tourism Industry

As presented in this chapter, research findings suggest that tourism operators and industries affected by seasonality strive to work within the optimistic attributes of seasonality by, for instance, utilising the low periods of businesses and the destination to allow areas to recuperate and prepare for peak seasons (Flognfeldt 1988; Murphy 1985; Butler 2001). Commonly, to occupy the low period of the tourism, businesses and destinations revisit marketing as a strategy to create more business. Although beliefs and strategies of tourism management are critical components of tourism, there is a wide variation of management styles and approaches used by individuals, tourism operators, destinations, and governments to deal with tourism shortfalls. In addition, destinations and countries can and do spend a great deal of money on marketing and policies to attempt to sustain a tourism economy during low periods. Tourism operators and destination areas believe that the only support available during the low periods of tourism is marketing (Flognfeldt 1988; Murphy 1985; Butler 2001).

### 2.5.1 Mitigating Negative Impacts of Seasonality on the Tourism Industry

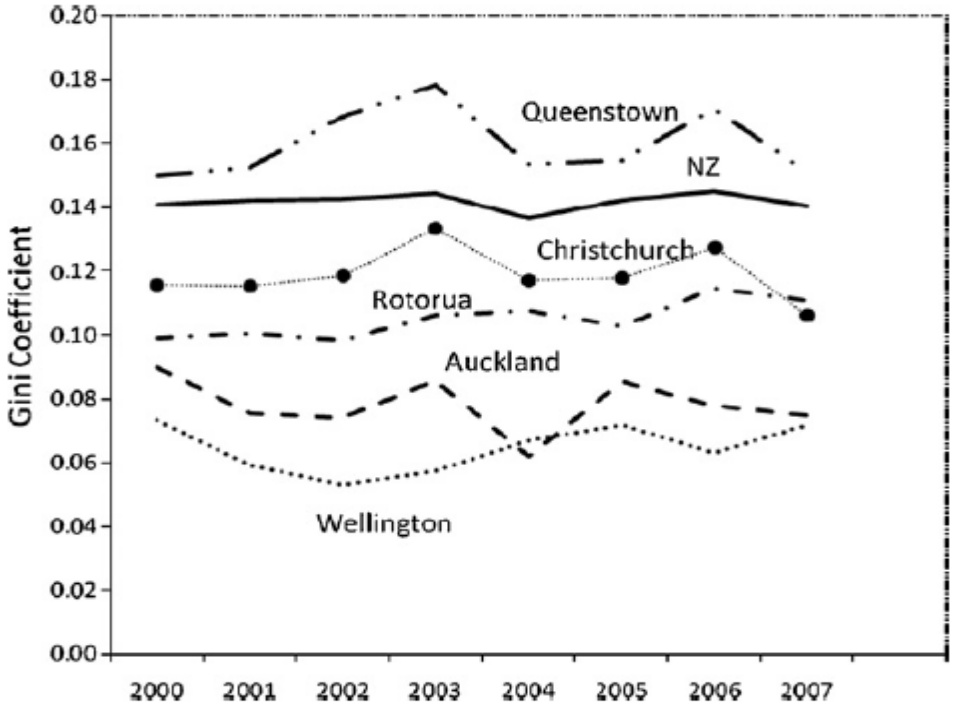
Netherlands (1991) claims that global attempts to minimise seasonality are minimal and that destinations hope to mitigate seasonal weaknesses by smoothing out the peaks and troughs of annual tourism trade. Due to the unresolved problems of seasonality, many destinations are faced with inadequate employment schemes, staggering social programs, devaluing investments, and exhausted government support (Simpson 2001). Yet, according to Page and Hall (1999) and as stated earlier, Duval (2003) concedes that the transition of a destination from a seasonal destination to a year-round tourism destination is difficult to accomplish.

The impacts of seasonality on destinations differs from country to country and from region to region (Baum & Luntorp 2001). For a destination to combat seasonality, it must produce resources and actions to achieve year-round attractions. Bar-On (1975) contends that seasonality regularly affects business and activities usually at the same time and with the same intensity. Likewise, Reid (2003, p.73) argues that tourism's failure in an area is not the responsibility of any one group, as "tourism is not a single entity, but a pattern of facilities and activities which includes the reaction of one part to the others." The disadvantages of tourism development and the economy of seasonality lie in the industry's inability to develop formative and

functional models that offer stability to local economies. Commonly, an area that was once prosperous can be “left with excess capacity and a shortfall in tourist revenue” (Craik 1991, p.7). The complexity of the tourism industry’s services can, however, make it problematic to determine accurate readings of the tourism industry’s success compared to other industries whose statistics are more conclusive (Shaw and Williams 2002).

Being aware of the seasonal impacts of tourism can allow the industry to address solutions for seasonality. Models provide the necessary information to manage the industry’s performance in the absence of official statistics (Shaw and Williams 2002). The Gini coefficient is a useful tool to determine if there is an equal or unequal distribution of guest arrivals. On a Gini coefficient graph, the number usually varies between 0 and 1. If the number is closer to zero, this indicates that the guest nights are the same over a given time period. However, if the Gini coefficient is closer to one, it is likely that the arrivals were not spread out evenly but concentrated in specific periods. Figure 3 demonstrates that New Zealand’s South Island had unequal distribution of guest arrivals compared to the North Island. Moreover, Queenstown had the highest Gini coefficient compared to the other four destination arrivals.

FIGURE 4. Gini Coefficients of the Top Five Regional Destinations in New Zealand 2000/2007




Source: Lim, Chang and Mc Alder 2008, p. 89

2.5.2 Implementing Effective Tourism Measures

Today, the tourism industry is making concerted efforts to sustain tourism, in part by minimising seasonality. Without prior planning, tourism development faces financial constraints, unreliable investors, and a lack of cohesiveness with surrounding businesses. Wen and Tisdell (2001) provide a clear breakdown of how successful and sustainable tourism is implemented. They suggest there is a considerable direct economic profit from the development of tourism that flows into a country in five ways:

- Rising domestic per capita incomes may stimulate the demand for tourism, including domestic tourism.
- Rising levels of per capita income overseas, especially in countries near a tourism destination nation, are likely to increase inbound tourism in that nation.
- Rising incomes are usually associated with rising levels of education and greater investment in human capital, and these tend to increase tourism demand.
- In a nation experiencing economic development, its infrastructure and available supply of tourist

> services and facilities usually expands. This supply-side change is favourable to tourism development.
> ▪ As a nation develops, reduced risks of disease and higher levels of education and management seem likely. These are favourable to expansion of tourism.
>
> (Wen and Tisdell 2001, p.06)

2.5.3 Tourism as an Economic Solution

The advantage of the tourism industry is that it is progressive, as "tourism is highly dynamic and strongly influenced by economic, political, social, environmental, and technological change" (Hall and Page 1999, p.1). Tourism can offer stability for countries and communities that have lost some of their original sources of income such as farming, fishing, or industrial employment. Moreover, tourism can improve economic conditions (Tourism New Zealand nd). Below are three locations that used three different tactics to increase tourism activity and contribute to the local economies.

Atlantic Canada, Singapore and Florida have all introduced tourism to improve economic conditions (Jollife and Franswork 2003). Atlantic Canada introduced tourism to combat economically deficient geographical areas and to increase employment (Jollife and Farnswork 2003). According to the Atlantic Opportunities Agency (2003), "tourism now generates CAD3.16 billion annually in 'export revenues', CAD500 million a year in tax revenues, and 100,000 jobs for Atlantic Canadians." In Singapore, the development of the retail district contributed to the tourism economy (Hi and Yuen 2002). According to Chin (2005), "[v]isitors to Singapore [in 2003] spent USD2,277 million on shopping alone, accounting for 53% of total visitor spending." The assured success of visitor spending in the retail sector encouraged the Singapore Tourism Board to implement strategies to become the shopping capital of Asia. In Florida, Disneyworld triggered a spill-off effect in surrounding areas, contributing to employment, transportation, accommodation, tourism, and infrastructure in the area (Reid 2003)

## 2.6 Summary

As stated at the outset of this chapter, extant literature pertaining to tourism operators' perceptions of seasonality in New Zealand is limited. Therefore, this

chapter presented general themes and topics, including (i) the positive and negative effects of seasonality in tourism; (ii) the role of environmental change in significantly altering natural seasonality and its subsequent impact on tourism; and (iii) proactive solutions implemented by business, government, and investors to counteract the negative impacts of seasonality and promote long-term, sustainable tourism industries. This literature review is by no means exhaustive, but it does provide key themes and factors relating to seasonality and its influences on tourism. For the purpose of this study, it also provides additional support to aid in the understanding of the probable perceptions tourism operators hold of seasonality and its effects on tourism, including their own tourism operations. Chapter Three will provide the rationale for choosing the qualitative research approach for this study and outline the method used in collecting the data to identify and characterise the perception of seasonality held by tourism operators in Queenstown.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Characterising Seasonality: Method

The purpose of the following chapter is to outline both the rationale and method used to acquire and subsequently utilise data collected during the qualitative semi-structured interview process. As previously stated, the intent of this research is to identify and characterize the perception of seasonality held by tourism operators in Queenstown and to explore the practices and/or strategies used to address seasonality issues.

The chapter first provides a brief review of qualitative versus quantitative research method and outlines the rationale behind the implementation of a qualitative research approach for this study. Following this, details of the following items are discussed: (i) research strategy, (ii) selection of size and type of sample, (iii) data collection techniques employed, (iv) some of the main interview limitations, and (v) the framework analysis techniques utilised.

### 3.1 Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach was implemented for this study as the means to analyse the data collected, as such an approach would most effectively reveal any trends (Denzin and Lincolin 1994; Peterson 1994), as well as the understandings and perceptions that tourism business operators had, with respect to the impact of seasonality upon their respective businesses. Qualitative research is the ideal means through which to explore and understand the perceptions and beliefs of persons within the tourism industry as it allows the researcher to closely interact with the informants with minimal restrictions (Decorp 1999), and is used in many other disciplines (Riley and Love 2000). According to Cohen (1988), without the contribution of qualitative methods many of the important outcomes of tourism research would never have occurred (Boorstin 1964; Cohen 1972, 1973, 1979; Graburn 1976, 1983; MacCannell 1973, 1976; Smith 1977). Additionally, the exploratory nature of this research supported the choice of a qualitative methodology. Silverman (2005) notes that qualitative methods are commonly used

in exploratory research, often because it is the most effective approach the researcher can adopt to best address the research questions that are being examined (Yin 1994). Exploratory research is generally the first approach utilised, which can be followed up subsequently with more definitive or quantitative studies. This is especially relevant for the research problem addressed in this thesis, as both qualitative information and quantitative data are lacking. As Silverman (2005, p.37) and Creswell (2003) both note, "This study can therefore be seen as being exploratory rather than definitive, examining the achievements of routine by a single individual in a specific setting in such a way that further analytical possibilities are opened up."

Importantly, Silverman (2005, p.6) also states, "No method of research, whether it is a qualitative or quantitative method, is better than the other…you should choose a method that is appropriate to what you are trying to find out." Thus, after a thorough review of qualitative and quantitative literature and the existing research information and data pertinent to examining seasonality in Queenstown, the qualitative research approach was considered the most applicable for elucidating the leading perceptions relating to the concept of seasonality upheld by Queenstown's tourism sector.

### 3.1.1 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research Methods

Before further expanding on the rationale behind adoption of the qualitative method, it is important to briefly outline the important differences between qualitative and quantitative methods. Table 2 summarises the key differences between qualitative and quantitative methods.

TABLE 2. Common Differences Between Quantitative and Qualitative Research Strategies

| **Quantitative** | **Qualitative** |
|---|---|
| 1. Data Expresses In Numbers | 1. Data Expressed In Words |
| 2. Hypothetic-Deductive | 2. Inductive |
| 3. Controlled Research Situation | 3. Naturally Occurring and Contextual |
| 4. Isolation of Operationally Defined Variables | 4. Holistic View of Phenomena |
| 5. Seeks Objectivity | 5. Interested In Subjectivity |
| 6. Emphasis On Prediction and Explanation | 6. Emphasis on Description, Exploration, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Searching For Meaning |
| 7. Researcher Directs, Manipulates, Controls | 7. Researcher Participants and Collaborates |
| 8. Statistical Analysis | 8. Text Analysis |

Source: Rudestam and Newton 2007, p.38

A crucial difference between the two research methods is the way in which data is collected. Quantitative research aims to acquire data *objectively* so that correlations and/or conclusions can be *deduced*. In contrast, qualitative research is more focussed on the collection of *subjective* research information in which trends and patterns are interpreted *inductively*. Neuman (2001) outlines the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research in the following table:

Table 3. Qualitative Research vs. Quantitative Research

**Qualitative Research**

- Captures and discovers meaning once the researcher becomes immersed in the data;
- Concepts are in the form of *themes*, *motifs*, *generalisations* and *taxonomies*;
- Measures are created in an ad hoc manner and are often specific to the individual setting or researcher;
- Data is in the form of words and images from documents, observations and transcriptions;
- Theory can be causal or non-causal and is often inductive;
- Research procedures are unique, and replication is very rare;
- Analysis proceeds by extracting themes or generalisations from evidence and organising data to present a coherent, consistent picture.

**Quantitative Research**

- The researcher begins with a 'hypothesis' that will be tested throughout the course of the research program;
- Concepts are in the form of *distinct variables*;
- Measures are systematically created before data collection and are standardised;
- Data are in the form of numbers calculated from precise measurement techniques;
- Theory is largely causal and deductive;
- Procedures are standard, and replication is assumed;
- Data analysis proceeds by use of statistics, tables, or charts and discusses how the results support and correlate to the hypothesis that is being tested.

Source: Neuman 2001, p.145

McCracken (1988, p.17) considers that the main difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches is:

> …the number and kind of respondents that should be recruited for research purposes. The quantitative project requires investigators to construct a sample of the necessary size and type to generalize to larger population. In qualitative case, however, the issue is not one of generalizability. It is that of access. The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world.

There can be an expectation to conduct quantitative research, because it is often considered to result in more tangible and objective data, less open to interpretation or misinterpretation. However, qualitative research, as one of the most widely used methodologies in social science (Bryman 2004) and regularly used within the tourism research community (Riley and Love 2000; Jennings 2004), can often uncover more complete and intricate relationships and/or correlations in such a way that is only hinted at through quantitative research (McCracken 1988; Silverman 2005). As McCracken (1988, p.17) states, "Qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words much more intense than extensive in its objective."

### 3.1.2 Rationale for Qualitative Approach

The focus of this research is to explore seasonality in Queenstown from the perspective of the tourism operator, a topic which is inherently subjective in nature and somewhat precludes the use of quantitative analysis to evaluate (Horn and Simmons 2001). According to Silverman (2005, p.112), "Many qualitative researchers believe that they can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data." Research information was collected for this study from five *indicator* tourism sectors (accommodations, retail, transportation, restaurant, and outdoor recreation) in Queenstown in order to characterise trends with respect to seasonality. The sectors

are considered to adequately represent or image the diverse components of the tourism industry in Queenstown and thus, to some degree, function as a general monitor for the wellbeing of the industry. During the research design and planning phase of the study, information regarding seasonality and its effects on the industry was scarce, which necessitated carrying out a purely exploratory study. Characterising and interpreting perceptions of the business owners from the five indicator tourism sectors was a challenging task and assessing trends in the resultant research information difficult because of the subjective, individual, and changeable nature of responses from participants. Fittingly, Polkinghorne (2005, p.138) states: "a primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness." Taylor and Bogdan (Taylor and Bogdan 1998 in Ponterotto 2005, p.128) have a comparable view of qualitative research stating, "Qualitative findings are generally presented in everyday language and often incorporate participants' own words to describe …experience or phenomenon". In his article 'Language and Meaning: Data Collection in Qualitative Research', Polkinghorn (2005, p.138) states "human experience is a difficult area to study." and provides an outline of the qualitative research process:

> Qualitative research is inquiry aimed at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people's lives. Researchers using qualitative methods gather data that serve as evidence for their distilled descriptions. Qualitative data are gathered primarily in the form of spoken or written language rather than in the form of numbers. Possible data sources are interviews with participants, observations, documents, and artefacts. The data are usually transformed into written text for analytic use. Selection of interview participants requires purposive and iterative strategies. Production of interview data requires awareness of the complexity of self-reports and the relation between experience and language expression. To generate interview data of sufficient breadth and depth requires practiced skill and time. Production of useful data from other sources is addressed.
>
> Polkinghorn 2005, p.137)

Characterising and evaluating seasonality through the responses of tourism businesses operators is a unique but challenging approach to monitoring overall effects of seasonality in Queenstown. Both the lack of pertinent and comparable studies and the general infancy of the seasonality research in Queenstown made it

difficult to consider a quantitative research approach, and hence an exploratory qualitative study was determined to be the best research method to adopt.

### 3.1.3 Types of Qualitative Approaches

A myriad of qualitative research methods could be adopted to evaluate seasonality from the perception of the tourism operator, particularly due to the selection of five different tourism sectors, each with its own concerns and issues. Attempting to document perceptions from these five sectors significantly increases the variability of the topic, and consequently the research methodology adopted must be able to adequately document this variability and diversity. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) and Bryman (2004) suggest there can be a variety of approaches taken to perform qualitative research: "subsume[ing] several diverse research methods that differ from each other considerably" (Bryman 2004, p.267).

For the research conducted in this study, three different types of qualitative approaches based on the work of Bryman (2004, p.267) were considered. These include:

> (1) Ethnography/participant observation, whereby the researcher inserts [him/herself] within the research areas to understand the sample he or she is studying;
> (2) Qualitative interviews, where there are many different types of interviews under a qualitative interview format such as unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews; and
> (3) Focus groups, where a group is gathered into a common area and the interviewer questions the group of individuals on selected issues that are applicable to the research being conducted.

The semi-structured interview process was chosen as the most appropriate data collection method to characterise the perceptions held by business tourism operators in Queenstown. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of providing the interviewer with both control of the interview and, importantly, flexibility to make changes during the interview, if the need arose (Jennings 2004; Decrop 1999). Such a method allows for tailoring or customising of the interview to create an environment that will maximise the chances of documenting the diversity of thoughts and perceptions the participants may have with respect to the topic.

## 3.2 Research Strategy

### 3.2.1 Selection of Study Area

Dunedin and Queenstown, both located in the South Island of New Zealand, were initially identified as potential candidates to collect data relating to the impacts of seasonality on tourism, primarily for logistical and financial reasons. Area type was ideally considered to be comprised of a medium-to-large sustainable tourism industry and to have a sizeable business sector that was characterised by diverse types of tourism operators. When the potential study areas were compared, Queenstown was the more favourable of the two destinations that were regularly visited by New Zealanders and international tourists alike. Dunedin, although often considered to be the main destination for national and international students, did not present the range of tourism operators necessary to measure the diverse dynamics of the five different established tourism sectors selected for analysis. Additionally, the main research focus of this study, i.e. determining the perception of seasonality held by tourism operators, had not been previously studied in Queenstown, making it a highly attractive study area in which to undertake the research. Subsequently, ten interviews were conducted with two informants from each of the five principal sector areas: accommodation, retail, transportation, restaurant, and outdoor recreation. Such a diverse sampling was considered important in order to gain a representative and more thorough understanding of the impact of seasonality in Queenstown, in addition to delineating the possible relationships and/or correlations among the five key sectors examined.

### 3.2.2 Sample Size and Sampling Method

According to Marshell (2006), to encompass entire populations is not logical, practical, or affordable. Ideally, the sample size of a study can be determined by what the researcher hopes to derive from the study, as well as the anticipated timeline for the study (Morse 2004; Warren 2002). In addition, it was more important to select informants and to gather data that provided unique information than finding similar answers (Thompson 1999). Further, Bryman (2004) suggests that time and cost can be major criteria that control the sample size used during data collection. Importantly, these two elements were considerable constraints that determined the final sample size in this study, particularly as limited finances and a

short-time frame to complete interviews were key factors surrounding the data collection stage of the study (Decrop 1991).

For the purpose of this research, the sample size should be:

(1) Representative of the range of tourism businesses in Queenstown as a whole; and,

(2) Sufficient in number to provide a useful sample of the different views/perceptions from the diverse spectrum of business sectors in the Queenstown area.

Hence, the sample size for this research was designed to involve collecting data from the five main business sectors (accommodations, retail, outdoor recreation, restaurant and transportation sectors) to ensure appropriate representation of the main areas that comprise the Queenstown tourism industry (Kuzel 1992; Charmaz 2000).

Sampling in qualitative work in tourism was challenging due to the minimal tourism research method literature available related to this thesis. In addition, at the time of the design of the sample, information regarding sample design and research methods was gathered from various fields such as education, medicine, and psychology. At present, it seems that more tourism related research method literature is plentiful and not limited. Such researchers include: Weber (2001); Kandasamy and Ancheri (2009); Downward and Mearman (2004); Song and Li (2008); Lynch (2005); Connell and Lowe (1997) and Benckendorff (2009).

According to Bryman (2004), uncertainty in deciding the sample number frequency for a study is a common concern and can be quite challenging to determine. Other researchers (Morse 2004; Warren 2002; Finn et al. 2000) support this proposition and further suggest that the more samples gathered for a study the more confidence a researcher will have when analysing the resultant data. However, in many cases, it can be difficult to gauge at the time of data collection whether the sample numbers are adequate to reveal the key characteristics, trends, and correlations. McCracken (1988) believes less is more when it comes to qualitative sample size. It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them (McCracken 1988). In addition, it is important to have a sample that will reflect the range and diversity of a group (i.e.

tourism operators) (Kuzel 1992; Bryman 2004). For many research projects, eight respondents is perfectly sufficient, even though the quantitatively trained social scientist would reel at the thought of so small a sample, but it is important to remember that this group is not chosen to represent some part of a larger world. According to Lunsford and Lunsford (1995) there are two types of sampling methods, including probability and non-probability sampling: "Probability sampling involves simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling and disproportional sampling" (Lunsford and Lunsford 1995, p.108). On the other hand, "Non-probability sampling includes convenience sampling, consecutive sampling, judgmental sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling" (Lunsford and Lunsford 1995, p.105). Non-probability convenience sampling procedures were deemed most suitable for this study due to the scope of the topic being evaluated, the accessibility of the participants, and the total sample size available. Non-probability convenience sampling is often considered to be a 'purposeful' sampling procedure. Marshell (1996) indicates that the convenience sampling technique is less difficult than other techniques as it permits the researcher to obtain easily reached participants. Consequently, in order to increase the robustness of the data collected, accessible informants were interviewed and those who exhibited a greater degree of knowledge and awareness of the subject matter were selected for purposeful sampling (convenience sampling).

### 3.2.3 Informants

For the purpose of this study, a respondent is defined as:

(1) Any participant used in the study; and,

(2) An individual primarily selected by the researcher to answer questions and make observations utilising his/her knowledge and expertise in the area of research.

The nature of the interview process necessitates that the interviewer trusts that the informant will provide experienced information pertaining to the area of the study (Dalton 1964). The respondents chosen represented a selection of small and large Queenstown tourism business owners and managers. After approximately two weeks of correspondence, ten individuals were chosen to participate in the research study. Two individuals from each of the five main tourism sectors of Queenstown agreed to

volunteer their time and participate in the semi-structured interview process of this study. Each individual selected was presented with a collection of interview questions that were designed to define what perceptions they had with respect to the occurrence and impact of seasonality in Queenstown. Resources utilised to select informants included: the Queenstown and Southern Lakes Product Directory, Meeting and Incentive Planner 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, New Zealand Tourism Product Sales Guide, Queenstown Chamber of Commerce, and the Internet.

### 3.2.4 Interview Design

The semi-structured interview was the selected style. It could provide a flexible framework while also providing structure, such as through the use of prepared questions for the interview (Jennings 2004; Decrop 1999). The unstructured interview style was not selected, as it had no structure, could result in an immeasurable amount of conversation, and provided no designed questions (Jennings 2004). In order to conduct semi-structured interviews the researcher must determine the questions to be used within the interview. Gillham (2005, p.18) notes, "The development of the topics or areas of relevance to the researcher, and the precise wording and selection of questions…is critical for the construction of a research interview." Moreover, as Foddy (1994) claims, using questions as a means to gather data can be more economical and practical for the researcher to gather information.

#### *3.2.4.1 Development of Interview Questions*

One of the initial stages in building the interview was deciding on the composition of the questions to be asked and whether or not to utilize open-ended and closed questions. The two main objectives of the interview process were to provide a relaxing experience for the participants and collect high-quality data on the subject being examined. The two were not mutually exclusive as generally a relaxing and comfortable setting would allow the participant to talk with ease and a greater quantity and diversity of information would be able to be collected. In order to achieve these objectives, the researcher had to design questions that would encourage such an experience for the participants. Importantly, the selection of the questions would dictate the type of interviews carried out. A mix of both open-ended and closed questions would enable collection of both qualitative or subjective and

quantitative or objective data. McCracken summarizes the difference between the two question styles (1988, p.19):

> The difference between reporting abilities is, effectively, one of the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods. When the questions for which data are sought allow the respondent to respond readily and unambiguously, closed questions and quantitative methods are indicated…When the questions for which data are sought are likely to cause the respondent greater difficulty and imprecision the broader, more flexible net provided by qualitative technique is appropriate.

The diversity of the topics being addressed and also the exploratory nature of the research necessitated the use of primarily open-ended questions. The ideal interview setting for this study was one which allowed the participant to answer the question with no limitations (Schuman and Presser 1996) and resulted in a suite of answers that adequately reflected the diversity of characterizing the trends and impacts of seasonality on Queenstown tourism businesses.

*3.2.4.2 The Order the Questions*

The sequence in which questions are asked in an interview can greatly impact the quality of the data acquired. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) advocate an interview format that utilises questions progressing from simple and general questions to more complex ones over the period of the interview session:

> The sequence and framing of the interview questions will also need to be for example ensuring that easier and less threatening, non-controversial questions are addressed earlier in the interview in order to put respondents at their ease… This might mean that the 'what' questions precede the more searching and difficult 'how' and 'why' questions.

It was important when designing the progression of interview questions that it be composed and ordered in a manner that would allow the participant to have as relaxing experience as possible (Potter and Hepburn 2005); in this way, by initiating the interview with easy or comfortable questions the respondents were able to familiarize themselves with the interviewer and also ease into the subject matter.

The composition of the final interview used in this study evolved from simple and general questions to more specific and complex and was subdivided accordingly into four main sections, (discussed in detail in section 3.2.4.5) including:

(1) A *grand tour section* designed to introduce the respondents to the subject matter and relax them;

(2) A section regarding *background of business and scope of seasonality knowledge* aimed at referencing the respondents with respect to the particular sector they belonged to and gauging their understanding of seasonality;

(3) A section to assess the respondents' views of *support from Queenstown*; and,

(4) A final section designed at determining whether the respondents from that particular business *perceived seasonality to have a major impact on Queenstown's tourism industry*.

*3.2.4.3 Pilot Test of the Interview Questions*

A pilot test was performed in order to determine the appropriateness of the wording used in each question, whether the individuals understood the questions, and if any questions were superfluous and/or required amendment. An assessment of the results of this pilot test would allow revisions of the wording of the questions, the ways in which the questions were asked, and the complement of questions, including removal of those that resulted in redundant information. Prior to the interview stage to be conducted in Queenstown, a pilot-test was conducted in Dunedin with the participation of four individuals, including two business operators from the Dunedin business sector and two students from the University of Otago. Reamer (1998, p.231) emphasizes the importance of a pilot test and states that a pilot test "allows the researcher to have a 'dry run' or 'test drive' with an instrument before actually using it to collect data." The pilot test can identify many weaknesses in an interview design and resolve several outstanding issues, as Reamer (1998, pp.231-232) has indicated in the following list:

1. Does the "sequence of questions make sense."
2. "What seems fine on paper may seem quite different when it is pre-tested."
3. "May find the order of the questions seem odd in one place or another and needs to be revised."
4. "Ask respondents to offer feedback on the sequencing of questions."

5. Determine if “questions’ wording makes sense.”
6. “It is useful to ask respondents in a pre-test to tell us when they think questions are unclear and or confusing.”

The pilot test conducted in Dunedin with the four informants provided necessary information to refine the interview design so that better quality data would be collected during the Queenstown interviews. Several deficiencies in the initial interview design were highlighted during the Dunedin pilot study. Table 4 summarises the deficiencies that became evident using Reamer’s (1998) suggested questions. These questions were helpful to gain more objective insight into the design of the interview.

Table 4. Summary of Pilot Study Results based on Reamer (1998)

| | **Reamer (1998) Question** | **Pilot Test Result** |
|---|---|---|
| ***1*** | *Did the sequence of questions make sense*? | The sequence of the questions for the study appeared to endure for the pilot test. |
| ***2*** | *What seems fine on paper may seem quite different when it is pre-tested.* | • This statement was true when the pilot test was conducted.<br>• Various questions were too verbose.<br>• Some questions were redundant. |
| ***3*** | *May find the order of the questions seem odd in one place or another and needs revision.* | Pilot test showed robustness in order of questioning. |
| ***4*** | *Ask respondents to offer feedback on the sequencing of questions.* | • The respondents suggested sentences be shortened and made clearer.<br>• The respondents provided their personal opinion on what should be asked or not asked in the interview. |
| | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ***5*** | *Determine if questions wording makes sense.* | When the interview questions were read to the respondents, some questions did not make sense.<br>• Some wording was changed.<br>• Question delivery was improved. |
| ***6*** | *It is useful to ask respondents in a pre-test to tell us when they think questions are unclear and or confusing.* | Respondents were helpful in stopping the pilot test at various points to address questions and concerns that they felt would be necessary for the success of the interview in the future. |
| ***7*** | *Determine how long it takes to complete a typical interview.* | An interview could be conducted in 30-45 minutes. |

Source: Reamer 1998, pp.231-232

The respondents involved in the pilot test offered several suggestions on wording of sentences, order of questions, and their personal opinions relating to the topic. The main revisions made to the interview design consisted of a minor reordering of questions, rewording of questions to improve understanding, and removal of questions that resulted in redundant data.

*3.2.4.5 The Final Interview Structure*

Subsequent to initial interview design, pilot testing, and revision, the final interview structure consisted of four principal sections, for simplicity referred to as: (i) the grand tour, (ii) background of business and scope of seasonality knowledge, (iii) support from Queenstown, and (iv) business perspective of Queenstown businesses. Each section is outlined on the following page. Table 4 summarises the type of data collected, the specific themes each of the four sections was designed to address, and the main sources used to design both the interview structure and the specific details of the questions asked.

Table 5. Summary of main goals and information obtained for each of the four interview sections in addition to key references used to design interview.

| **Question / Topic Area** | **Goal of Section** | **Key Information Obtained** | **Main references/ sources used during Interview design** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Grand Tour Questions*** | To ease respondent into the interview process. | Characteristics of respondent and business | Schuman & Presser (1981), Ream (1998), Potter &Hepburn (2005), Cohen, Maninon & Morrison (2000), Davies (2003), Phillimore & Goodmore (2004), Visscher, Snider & Silver (2005),Vander Stoep (2008) |
| ***Background of Business and Scope of Seasonality Knowledge*** | Promote a clearer understanding of the outcomes of the tourism business within Queenstown.<br><br>Determine if the respondents are affected by seasonality. | Respondents' awareness of seasonality<br><br>Respondents' sense of the level of impact on them due to seasonality. | Schuman & Presser (1981), Ream (1998), Potter &Hepburn (2005), Cohen, Maninon & Morrison (2000), Davies (2003), Phillimore & Goodmore (2004), Visscher, Snider,& Silver (2005),Vander Stoep (2008) |
| ***Business Support*** | Determine if any business support was available to the participants in Queenstown. | Respondents' awareness of support agencies in Queenstown.<br><br>Respondents' perception of the impact and effectiveness of support agencies | Schuman & Presser (1981), Ream (1998), Potter &Hepburn (2005), Cohen, Maninon & Morrison (2000), Davies (2003), Phillimore & Goodmore (2004), Visscher, Snider & Silver (2005),Vander Stoep (2008) |
| ***Business Perspective of Queenstown Businesses*** | Assess respondents' perception of whether seasonality was truly affecting internal unity and sustainability of business operations. | Measure of respondents' belief of the negative or positive impact on seasonality in relation to their business and in regards to the tourism industry in general in Queenstown. | Schuman & Presser (1981), Ream (1998), Potter &Hepburn (2005), Cohen, Maninon & Morrison (2000), Davies (2003), Phillimore & Goodmore (2004), Visscher, Snider & Silver (2005),Vander Stoep (2008) |

The 'Grand Tour' section primary information revealed the characteristics of the respondent and the business s/he owned and/or worked in. The 'Background of Business and Scope of Seasonality Knowledge' presented the respondents' awareness of seasonality. Moreover, it demonstrated the respondents' level of impact felt due to seasonality. The third section 'Business Support' demonstrated respondents'

awareness of support agencies in Queenstown. The fourth and final section 'Business Perspective of Queenstown Businesses' measured respondents' beliefs about the negative or positive impact on seasonality in relation to their businesses and in regards to the tourism industry in general in Queenstown.

The Grand Tour Section

The grand tour section was made up of six questions. These questions addressed the age of the business and the length of time that the business was owned by the participant or employer that the participant currently worked for. Questions asked in this section focussed on whether working in the tourism industry was a lifestyle choice or for financial gain for the respondent. The last component of the grand tour questions introduced concerns the respondent may have. For example, the questions focussed on potential issues facing the tourism businesses in Queenstown and whether or not seasonality was perceived to be affecting the business.

Background of Business and Scope of Seasonality Knowledge

The second section of the interview focussed on the respondents' beliefs about and knowledge of the business and the impact of seasonality upon it. The section began by asking the participant to outline what seasonality meant to their business and the obstacles within the tourism sector. The subsequentr questions concerning finances were focussed on determining whether the Queenstown tourism industry provides financial support, or if there was any financial support available to businesses. Additionally, it was important to understand if the sector was managing the growth of tourism in the areas of planning and development. Questioning in this section concluded by attempting to construe how the sector and business adjusted to the impacts of seasonality. Questions addressing this issue focussed on eight key issues, including:

1. The effect on the business of seasonality of tourists' arrival and their associated expenditures;
2. Outside constraints facing tourism business in Queenstown;
3. Additional constraints facing the tourism sector;
4. Personal business experience and the impact of seasonal fluctuations;
5. Whether the business experienced seasonal peaks or business performance was consistent throughout the year;
6. Whether peaks arose during same or different times each year;
7. How the business managed employees as a resource with respect to seasonal fluctuations; and

8. Whether employment numbers were the same all year round.

Support from Queenstown

This section was designed to ascertain the respondents' perceptions of the local council, government, and/or businesses perspective regarding seasonality's impact on infrastructure (*structural concerns*) and whether seasonality impacted the development of tourism within Queenstown.

Business Perspective of the Impact of Seasonality on Queenstown Business

The interview concluded with a series of questions aimed at determining the respondents' beliefs and general perspective on how seasonality impacted both the tourism business that they owned or managed and the tourism industry within Queenstown as a whole.

## 3.3 Data Collection: Conducting the Semi-structured Interviews

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten tourism business owners and/or managers who represented the five sectors of interest in Queenstown. The interviews dealt with the four core themes outlined above; a copy of the semi-structured interview questions is provided in Appendix One. The format of semi-structured interview was designed to ensure that the subject matter was sufficiently broad to allow each interviewee's responses to occur spontaneously.

### 3.3.1 Data Collection: Procedure

Potential candidates within the Queenstown business community were sought out over a two week interval, typically through a series of phone calls. When an interviewee was identified, an interview was scheduled. Ten such interviews were subsequently carried out, with the data collected during these interviews considered to represent a 'sample'. The interview process took approximately one week to complete and was conducted at various business locations in Queenstown. Typically two interviews were conducted in a day. The setting for each interview varied but was generally in a quiet area at the respondent's business or at a neighbouring cafe of his/her choice. Each interview was recorded using a Sony handheld cassette voice recorder and was later transcribed. A time limit of 45 minutes was placed on each

interview, primarily for practical and time management reasons. Subsequent data preparation, analysis, and interpretation was completed over a three-month period.

### 3.3.2 Limitations of Semi-structured Questions

*"What is Seasonality?"*

The semi-structured questions were tailored to focus predominantly on issues revolving around the concept of seasonality and its impact on tourism businesses in Queenstown. However, as the interviews proceeded, it became evident that very few respondents had encountered the term '*seasonality*' prior to the interview, and consequently had little knowledge of what the term meant in an academic framework. When this situation was recognized during the interview, information defining the concept of seasonality was given to the respondents. The information focussed on the difference between institutional and natural seasonality in tourism, and the interview did not proceed until the respondents felt comfortable with their understanding of the subject.

*Employee versus Employer*

In a few of the interviews conducted, and often without notice, business owners requested that their managers participate in the interview in their place. In these cases, questions were modified to accommodate the managers and their concerns, i.e., mainly to reflect that they were employees rather than owners. For example, questions such as, How long have you worked for this business? Replaced the originally planned question, How long have you owned this business? With respect to seasonality, the original question, Do you think seasonality is affecting your business? Was replaced with, Do you think seasonality is affecting the business you work for? These were important adjustments to make to the questioning, as the perception of the business owner could differ significantly from that of the business manager.

## 3.4 Framework Analysis

During the design and planning stages of the research method implemented during this study, a contingency plan was created so that a second phase of interviews could be arranged if sufficient data were not obtained during the initial

interview process. The contingency plan involved gathering additional samples from two different respondents who worked in the five business sectors of interest (i.e. accommodations, restaurants, retail, outdoor recreation, and transportation). After a preliminary review of the interviews completed during the Stage 1 interview process, it was determined that the data collected were adequate when the key information was obtained for each of the four sections (as outlined in Table 3 above). Satisfactorily obtaining the information in the four main sections enabled the core question of the research to be evaluated; i.e., to identify and characterize the perception of seasonality held by tourism operators in Queenstown. Ulin, Robinson and Tolley (2005, p.55) suggest that when the answer to the research question begins to emerge from the data it confirms that what was gathered was sufficient.

Additionally, Glaser and Strauss (1967, in Ulin, Robinson & Tolley 2005, p.55) suggest: "When little new information is coming from your observation, interviews, or focus group discussions, you can be reasonably confident that you have saturated that source of information to the point of redundancy." This saturation point was adequately met at the completion of the Stage 1 interview process; hence, the contingency plan developed was deemed unnecessary and therefore not undertaken.

After the primary interview information was gathered, an analysis of the information was carried out using what is commonly referred to as 'Thematic Analysis' or 'Framework Analysis' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000). Braum and Clark (2006, p.79) point out that thematic analysis is a "method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data." However, details in regard to the mechanics of carrying out thematic analysis are somewhat limited (Braum and Clark 2006). Table 5 outlines the different stages that can be used to perform thematic analysis based on the work of Braum and Clarke (2006) and that was adopted as a workflow for data collected in this study.

Table 6. Phases of Thematic Analysis

| | **Phase** | **Description of the Process** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Familiarizing Yourself With Your Data | Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. |
| 2 | Generating Initial Codes | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set collating data relevant to each code. |
| 3 | Searching For Themes | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| 4 | Reviewing Themes | Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis. |
| 5 | Defining and Naming Themes | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names of each theme. |
| 6 | Producing The Report | The final opportunity for analysis of selected extracts, relating back of analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

Source: Braum and Clarke 2006, p.87

The central purpose of this type of thematic analysis is to search and identify patterns and common themes within the data. The type of coding to use in such an analysis process is open coding, which is described below in detail. According to Hussey and Hussey (1997, p. 266) open coding "is the process of indentifying, analysing and categorising the raw data."

### 3.4.1 Coding and Case Charts

For this study, data analysis was carried out in a series of five steps, including:

(1) Subsequent to interview transcription, transcribed data were meticulously reviewed to identify patterns;

(2) Open coding of the data was subsequently performed. Open coding of the transcribed data involved deconstructing each interview and reviewing all questions separately. Similar codes and non-similar codes were compared to create themes that were then placed in case tables;

(3) Case tables were established and analysed to highlight areas where common themes existed. Successful completion of this step was crucial in order to further examine the data in an organised, structured, and logical manner and thus determine the core themes that were associated with each respondent and sector(s). Three main case tables were created during this step, including case tables to:

a) represent each participant;
b) compare operators within the sector; and,

c) compare the sectors to each other.

Prior to the completion of these three main case tables, each case table theme was re-evaluated to critique the core themes resulting in either modification of the theme or removal of the theme from the final tables (Braum and Clarke 2006; Lacey and Luff 2001).

(4) The themes that emerged from each of the final case tables were further examined against each other to determine if any themes had been missed and if any new themes had appeared, and;

(5) This step enabled cumulative development of a synopsis to identify and manage the main themes as they became evident and needed to be completed prior to final data interpretation and delineation of results.

Data interpretation took place in three stages, including:

(1) The results from each respondent (i.e., the tourism business participant) were then compared to the results of other interviews (businesses) conducted. This method allowed for easy construction of a framework in which to visually review results of each question and each sample;

(2) Results for the two interviews conducted from an individual sector were also compared to each other to identify any common or disparate themes that may have been characteristic for a particular business sector, and;

(3) Finally, the five sectors were examined in context to each other in order to ascertain if similar themes occurred between sectors.

## 3.5 Summary

The preceding discussion provides a thorough outline of the rationale and method employed to achieve the main objective of the thesis, i.e. characterising and evaluating seasonality through the responses of tourism businesses operators in Queenstown. Both the lack of pertinent and comparable studies and the general infancy of research on seasonality in Queenstown made it difficult to consider a quantitative research approach. Additionally, the subjective and exploratory nature of the topic necessitated the use of qualitative research methods in order to collect, analyse, and evaluate resultant datasets. Subsequent to initial interview design, pilot testing, and revision, a final interview structure was decided upon. The interview consisted of four principal sections; (i) the grand tour, (ii) background of business and scope of seasonality knowledge, (iii) support from Queenstown and (iv) business perspective of Queenstown businesses. Ten semi-structured interviews were

conducted with business owners in the five main business sectors in Queenstown (i.e. accommodations, retail, outdoor recreation, restaurants and transportation sectors). The resultant sample size was considered to be representative of a range of respondents from the tourism sector in Queenstown as a whole, and sufficient in number to clearly define some of the different views/perceptions from the diverse spectrum of business sectors in the Queenstown area. Following completion of the interviews, the resultant data were analysed using thematic or framework analysis techniques. The central purpose of this type analysis was to search and identify patterns and common themes within the interview information. Data analysis was conducted in five steps including (i) Review of transcribed data to identify first order patterns, (ii) Deconstruction and open coding of the transcribed data and comparison of similar and dissimilar codes to create themes, (iii) Construction and initial assessment of case tables from thematic data which involved creation of case tables that represented the respondent and compared business operators within and between sectors, (iv) Secondary examination of case tables to re-examine emerging or missed themes, and (v) Synopsis development to manage theme trends. Chapter Four will present and discusses the results of the data analysis procedures that have been outlined above.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Results and Discussion

This chapter will discuss and provide an overview of the four major themes that emerged when the results from the five sectors (accommodation, retail, restaurant, outdoor recreation, and transportation) were analysed and compared with each other. These four themes (staffing, infrastructure, monetary/management of business, and seasonal peaks) constitute both a perception and a reality for the respondents from the tourism sector within the Queenstown area. As stated in Chapter One, the central question of this thesis involves determining whether and/or how seasonality is a concern for the tourism sector in Queenstown, New Zealand. It also involves exploring what policies and/or strategies have been adopted by the majority of business sectors to ensure their success and longevity.

The five aforementioned tourism business sectors will be examined to gauge the perceptions of Queenstown tourism operators, and to investigate how they are affected by, and deal with, the seasonal variations in tourism activity known as seasonality. The primary considerations in selecting businesses for this study included size, management style, and whether the business was locally-owned or corporate, all of which would have some influence on a business operator's perception of seasonality.

The businesses selected from the restaurant sector represented both small businesses (locally-owned) and large corporate restaurant establishments. Within the outdoor recreation sector, the businesses selected represent a sample from areas common in the outdoor recreation sector, such as water and land experiences. The retail sector selection of respondents was based on similar criteria in order to present as diverse a sample as possible; to this end, the retail stores selected were two locally-owned businesses, one small and one medium-sized. The accommodation sector was comprised of a locally-owned small bed and breakfast and a larger corporate-oriented hotel. Respondents from the transportation sector included two types of businesses, one land-oriented and one air-oriented.

## 4.1 Emerging Themes from Each Sector

As stated in Chapter One, information uncovered during the interview process provides a unique insight into the perceptions of seasonality held by respondents from the tourism business sectors. The two fundamental queries this information seeks to answer are:

> (1) Whether and/or how is seasonality a concern for the tourism business sector of Queenstown; and,
>
> (2) What policies and/or strategies have been adopted by the major business sectors to ensure their success and longevity?

The four principal themes that emerged from the data are considered to be major concerns for the tourism sector as a whole. Each of these four themes will be individually examined and discussed below through addressing the two questions and detailing the responses from the various sectors' interviewees.

### 4.1.1 Infrastructure

**(1) Whether and/or how is seasonality a concern for the tourism business sector of Queenstown?**

The majority of the respondents from the tourism business sectors of Queenstown believed that infrastructure was a concern due to seasonality and was the main outside constraint facing the tourism businesses in this area. It was agreed by respondents from all sectors that Queenstown must address the infrastructure problems immediately. As stated earlier in the literature review, Queenstown has been recognized by Regional Visitor Monitor to have sub-par infrastructure (Destination Queenstown 2008; Regional Visitor Monitor 2008). However, there were differences of opinion among respondents regarding the ways that infrastructure is a concern. Henry, from the accommodation sector, believed there needed to be increased focus on presentation and durability of infrastructure, and pointed out:

> [Infrastructure] is starting to show signs of breaking down now. Just in the last three to five years, [Queenstown] has grown too quickly for infrastructure. I think that the district plan is creating a situation where some of the visitors may be put off by the appearance of the place... too much concrete.

Grace, from the outdoor recreation sector, presented a similar point of view, suggesting that there were geographical limitations, and stating that the infrastructure of the area needed to improve in order for Queenstown itself to improve:

> Infrastructure is going to be a problem, as the geography of the areas is isolated and the road issues…nowhere to expand. Even if the money was available, they couldn't be built. Infrastructure is always going to be a problem road, air; the runway can't even get longer, issues certainly good and bad in a sense that will control everything.

The operators were concerned that the destination was in a continuous boom-and-bust cycle. It was generally agreed that while Queenstown was growing, it was not fully addressing the infrastructure concerns, such as roads, parking, the building style (too much concrete changing the natural landscape), and the amount of development. Carter, from the accommodation sector, commented: "In the last three to five years it has grown too quickly for infrastructure….I think that the district plan is creating a situation where some of the visitors may be put off by the appearance of the place…. It is starting to show signs of breaking down."

All respondents believed that Queenstown was repeating the same mistakes. For example, the airport needed to be extended again and again, which led the operators to wonder why building planners could not get it right the first time. A participant from the restaurant sector believed seasonality affected infrastructure in terms of sewage:

> It is a part of everything we do. It is a part of our life, but the demands that are put on those infrastructures during high season are absolutely incredible and it is only a matter of time before some things break…. It could be a pump…. It could be a bank…. Seasonal rain raises the level of the river by a half a metre in November you probably read about it. I have pictures…. It shuts down. We were on the second floor and obviously everything fine but you couldn't put anything down the sink because it would go straight into the lake, couldn't flush the loo...because it went straight into the lake. You know it was all a mess. We were closed for three and half weeks. We had to pay our staff during that time but we were insured and loss of profit…. Our insurance premium went through the roof and then two years later the exact same thing…. We had the big flood and a lot of insurance companies

> won't pay…. Overseas insurance companies are their own bosses.

As stated earlier in the literature review, Elliott (1997) and Amelung, Nicolls, Vinner (2007) suggest that the impacts on a destination's services and infrastructure need to be examined as seriously as the benefits of tourism to an area. Infrastructure is expected to be one of six areas to be addressed by the new federal government (TIAZ 2008).

**(2) What policies and/or strategies have been adopted by the major business sectors to ensure their success and longevity?**

The operators regularly adapt their businesses when faced with infrastructure concerns and presented an attitude that focused on acquiring as much money as possible during the busy period to make up for the low periods with minimal tourists. To achieve that goal, the operators planned to invest in their own business infrastructure. Operators generally believed it was out of their hands to address the larger and external infrastructure concerns, such as roads, parking, sewage, and development. They were concerned that infrastructure was being pushed to its limits during the peak periods of business for all sectors, including themselves and Queenstown as a destination. A respondent from the outdoor recreation sector pointed out:

> I think Queenstown will be wrecked. You know my vision, what I see [are] there will be houses all the way along the bottom of the Remarkable. I reckon there will be developers there because someone is going to pay the money for it and so, the farmer or the council or whoever own that land is going to go and take the money. It is short-term thinking not long-term planning. And people who come [into Queenstown]…come into their focus, [which] is very short-term [for] everyone, apart from a few, but there is more short-term than long-term. So, it is money-driven…. It is a transient town.

4.1.2 Staffing

**(1) Whether and/or how is seasonality a concern for the tourism business sector of Queenstown?**

The interview responses demonstrated that the shortage of high-quality employees due to seasonal peaks/seasonality was a continuing challenge for tourism

operators in Queenstown. As mentioned in the literature review, Queenstown has unsatisfactory customer service (Queenstown New Zealand 2007), uses international labour, and has a shortage of labour in all areas of tourism (workpermit.com 2007). Moreover, a common negative impact due to seasonality is staffing (Butler 2001; BarOn 1975; Clark 1981).

Grace, a tourism operator from the outdoor recreation sector, believes it is a "turnoff" for tourists when they are not getting the true New Zealand experience:

> I think for a flagship of New Zealand tourism to have probably every restaurant and/or bar that you walk into and be served by someone that doesn't have a Kiwi accent. I struggle with that…. More often than not, you will be served by someone in Queenstown that is not from New Zealand and that worries me, it has worried me for years. I just think that the whole lack of attention to the service industry…it doesn't get the attention that it needs because it is stripped by people who are getting three hundred percent return on their investment for their property.

As the level of business changes, necessary adjustments in the number of employees can affect the quality of staff. As found in most seasonality literature (Sorensen 1999), employees do not gain long-term training and experience due to the seasonal nature of their position. Sean, from the retail sector, explained the employer's main obstacle:

> Hanging on to good staff, providing that you have to cut people's hours down or lay them off from a business perspective long-term staff, is where you are at. That is probably the biggest problem of all as opposed to normal business because your peaks are so high your troughs are so low and you are retaining key staff and giving the younger ones career opportunities career paths.

The Greek island of Crete has concerns similar to Queenstown's, as the problem of labor shortage is being addressed through employment of migrant workers. The locals of Crete are frustrated that these migrant workers are reducing the jobs available to locals (Andriotis and Vaughan 2004). These increased concerns demonstrate the need for protection for the locals (Andriotis and Vaughan 2004). With the shortage of available local workers in Queenstown, it is clear that these are issues that need to be addressed for a sustainable and successful tourist industry.

According to Sorensen (1999), the impact of the ups and downs caused by seasonality affects wages, hours, and length of employment.

**(2) What policies and/or strategies have been adopted by the major business sectors to ensure their success and longevity?**

Staffing was a concern for the operators of Queenstown and, as stated in the literature review, the operators in New Zealand are aware of this concern (Workforce 2004). However, due to the seasonal nature of the tourism demand, the operators cannot provide full-time staff as readily as a non-seasonal business could. The operators wished that they could keep the employees indefinitely; however, due to the restrictions on their business, such as the lack of business and fixed costs during the seasonal lows, the employees had to be let go or have their hours reduced until business increased.

Strategies identified and used by the tourism business respondents in this study demonstrated that businesses would reduce or extend staffing levels throughout the year depending on demand. Staffing was perceived to be a concern that needed to be controlled by the government or council. One respondent from the retail sector claimed that in the past foreign workers were often paid in cash without the proper employee work forms because it took months to obtain a work visa. However, more recently, the government has fast-tracked work visas so that foreign workers can begin working legally within a few days, since this sector of Queenstown relies heavy on foreign workers.

Another common concern of staffing was the necessity to reduce employees' hours or terminate positions. Less concerning to the business was adding staff during the busy periods under a high peak of business of the operation. As stated in the literature review, the stress of seasonality can negatively impact on a destination's employment, services, and the health both of the tourism industry and the community that lives within the destination (Clark 1981; Sorensen 1999; Witt 1991). However, as stated in the literature review, preparing and implementing strategies and policies to address negative impacts of seasonality can reduce or even eliminate hardship for a destination.

The adding or removing of staff was the solution all respondents agreed upon in order to ensure sustainability during the fluctuations of low and high peaks of business. This was done annually and/or when needed by the tourism businesses. A common theme stated by the operators was the frustration of not being able to provide full-time work for employees due to seasonal fluctuations. Nevertheless, the operators admitted that they had no option but to offer part-time work only, as they had fixed costs and a budget to adhere to in order to make it through the low period of business.

### 4.1.3 Monetary/Management of Business

**(1) Whether and/or how is seasonality a concern for the tourism business sector of Queenstown?**

Successful management to address seasonality appeared to be the common thread regardless of the different issues the sectors or businesses faced. The operators made it clear that seasonality was a primary concern for them, especially in the area of budgeting, where they had to ensure that they had the right amount of resources (employees/stock) available to sustain the impacts of both high and low periods of business activity. The respondents agreed that seasonality affected their business all year long, and that sustaining business and resources was a major issue. Obstacles for them revolved around the concerns of balancing business demands due to fluctuations in seasonal demand. The impacts and modifications due to the rotation from peaks to troughs caused by seasonality is a major task to manage (Mak 2004; Witt 1991).

According to the respondents from the accommodation, outdoor recreation, and transportation sectors, there was little or no business support available to their sector. Moreover, they strongly believed that there was no financial backing from the government to combat seasonality and that they were very much dependent on their own financial resources to deal with monetary issues. As one respondent from the transportation sector stated, “The industry drives itself,” while another respondent from the same sector pointed out “[it was] not financial but support in strategy or support in joint ventures” that was needed. The respondents from the retail sector stood alone in claiming that the demand of tourism (sustaining businesses) was an obstacle facing the tourism business sector in Queenstown. Two sectors, accommodation and outdoor recreation, believed that the seasonality of tourists’ arrivals and expenditures affected their business, and they had to budget wisely to

ward off negative seasonal impacts on their businesses. Seasonal fluctuations were believed to be experienced by all businesses in the outdoor recreation, retail, and transportation sectors.

When asked what seasonality meant to them and their businesses, one operator from the restaurant sector provided a clear business owner's perspective on this issue:

> It means you have [something] to work towards…. You have to be ready for your busy times. You have to have your staff. But you have to be also ready for your flat times, not over staffed and overstocked. And having eleven years training in one outlet allows us to have an incredible set of records that we can go back to at any stage, and we work on those daily.

One operator from the accommodation sector commented that the Queenstown tourism business sector had no financial backing to combat seasonality, while another participant from the same sector believed that Queenstown worked very hard on trying to draw more business out of the high season and into the mid seasons: "The problem is financial so you can have more solutions but you will have to pay more money for that."

Successfully managing business during seasonal fluctuations throughout the year was considered by the operators to be a monumental task. Similar to the outlook of the respondent from the restaurant sector above, operators believed that their long-term experience and awareness of seasonality helped them know when the low periods/and high periods were approaching, allowing the businesses to prepare. However, the respondents' information showed that businesses run by larger corporations felt more comfortable when faced with the low peaks of seasonality, often stating that if the business needed more money to stay afloat during the slow periods, the corporation would supply the funding. The independent businesses tended to express their reliance on more self sufficient tactics, such as budgeting and the use of overdrafts, if necessary. According to a study done in Central Otago, the tourism operators' perceptions of other business was that other businesses had less seasonal fluctuation than theirs did (Duval 2004).

**(2) What policies and/or strategies have been adopted by the major business sectors to ensure their success and longevity?**

As stated earlier in the literature review, the tourism business sector has suggested that seasonality forces businesses to operate in a faster and more cost-cutting fashion, often reducing hours of operation and even shutting down during seasonal lows in order to secure their assets until the low season dissipates (Sorensen 1999). The tourism operators interviewed for this study believed that budgeting for seasonal fluctuations was the only way to survive and maintain their business. Commonly, during low periods of tourist expenditures, a business may reduce employees, have no employees, reduce hours, shut down altogether for periods, or put extra money into the business to remain viable. These strategies helped businesses meet their budgets during the low periods and cover fixed costs such as wages and inventory throughout the year. While respondents believed there was no financial backing to combat seasonality, they acknowledged the existence of marketing initiatives such as 'Destination Queenstown'. Even though the respondents were not in agreement about the type of support this was, they did agree that it was marketing-related.

Common strategies used by tourism operators during peak season was to increase employee and business hours and do everything possible to ensure that tourism revenue was generated, as after peak season there was less opportunity to obtain tourism revenue. In addition, the operators created policies within their own operations to ensure that revenue opportunities were not lost due to tourists not showing up. These policies included having the tourists put down deposits for a service and/or pay a penalty for cancellations and no-shows. By doing this, operators believed that not all potential profit was lost.

All operators within the five sectors believed their business reached a seasonal peak in one part of the year and did not maintain consistent performance throughout the year. Moreover, all of these sectors believed that their seasonal peaks arose at the same time each year. It was interesting that not one business experienced different peaks from year to year, as all businesses claimed that they knew when the peaks were coming and when they would dissipate. With this knowledge, the business operators commented that they were able to have measures in place to deal with the

diverse nature of the peaks and troughs. Such measures included being flexible with staffing complements and budgeting, and ensuring that necessary inventory supplies matched the seasonal variations in demand.

To manage staff during the seasonal fluctuations of business, the five sectors claimed they had a regular staff made up of core employees. Most of them would add part-time staff during the busiest periods. When the tourism demand decreased, these businesses would lay off the necessary number of staff, who were usually either temporary casual or permanent seasonal workers. It can also be expected that the seasonal employees seek support from government such as welfare and unemployment benefits (Wit 1991). It is imperative to have programs already existing to deal with the impact of seasonal employment and reduce the abrupt negative impacts on seasonal employees (Baum and Lundtorp 2001; Butler 2001; Koenigh-Lewis and Bsihcoff 2005). A contributing study to the understanding of seasonal employment done by Ismert and Petrick (2004) examined the motives of seasonal employees. This study is an example of ways the industry can learn how to help destinations and tourism operators understand the needs and motivations of seasonal employees and to develop policies and strategies to help build a better framework to host seasonal employment within a destination impacted by seasonality.

### 4.1.4 Seasonal Peaks

**(1) Whether and/or how is seasonality a concern for the tourism business sector of Queenstown?**

The diverse nature of seasonality/seasonal peaks can create a variety of concerns through their impact on tourism operators. In Queenstown, seasonal peaks caused by seasonality were clearly felt by the tourism operators interviewed for this study. They experienced seasonal fluctuations due to the demand of the type of tourists, whether it was domestic, international, or niche tourists, but also due to the type of payment (direct or deferred). Respondents from three sectors, outdoor recreation, restaurant, and retail, all believed that the obstacle arising from seasonality was trying to manage the business during the unpredictable aspects of seasonality. According to one operator from the retail sector, seasonality means “we are a two-peak a year business.” A transportation sector operator also felt that their business was affected by the seasons: “We have more [business] over the winters for skiers….The

seasons definitely play a part in that." A respondent from the restaurant sector said, "It would be great if there was consistency without that seasonality there…because our staff would be the same, the orders could be the same, all your processes and structures could be the same…save on a lot of money" It was found from the operators' results that seasonal peaks can cause business operations to adjust their budgets and increase or decrease staff (part-time, full-time employment, lay-offs).

As stated in the literature review, Damien O'Connor (New Zealand's Minister of Tourism) is aware of the measures tourism operators have to address due to the seasonal nature of tourism in New Zealand (O'Connor 2007). However, he believes that tourism will improve when the seasonal peaks and troughs are less obvious (O'Connor 2007). But ironing out the seasonal peaks and troughs for operators caused by seasonality can be difficult, according to Henry, an operator from the accommodation sector, who stated:

> The shoulder season or the low season.... It comes hard to operate at the same standards because we are quite a big [operation]…. Our fluctuations are regular in a year, so April, May, June in general are a little bit flat…the place isn't full… possibly October is the next flat month but the rest of the time we are quite busy, so we just have to have measures in place to make sure to look after those months as well.

A respondent from the restaurant sector agreed that the impact of the seasonal peaks and troughs is real. As he described it:

> Holidays don't affect us but weather does. I started working in Queenstown [thirty years ago], so at that time it had two very big shoulder periods. One April, May, June, July, and then one between winter and summer (October [un]til November). But we have progressed over the years. These shoulder seasons have cut down. We even close down for about three weeks and refurbish the [business].

Seasonality does cause negative impacts on tourism (Bar-On 1975; Soesilo and Mings 1987; Baum & Lundtorp 2001; Butler 2001; Koenig and Bischoff 2004; Hinch and Jackson 2000). As mentioned above and presented in the operators' claims, natural seasonality can limit the demand of business for a tourism operator.

A respondent named River from the retail sector stated, “Everyone wants a piece of the pie and there is not enough to go around…. Seasonality means to me looking into my crystal ball and going by the seat of my pants.” As stated in the literature review, seasonality can create an imbalance in the number of visitors and the amount of money the visitors spend (Butler 2001). Tourism is not always the best solution for every destination, as tourism can be a very seasonal industry that can cause major negative impacts to a destination’s resources, such as social programs, investments, government support, and employment support (Robinson 1976; BarOn 1975; Simpson 2001; Murphy 1985).

**(2) What policies and/or strategies have been adopted by the major business sectors to ensure their success and longevity?**

The operators ensured that they were prepared for the seasonal peaks. A respondent from the restaurant sector claimed that being prepared and budgeting was “just smart.” They believed that being prepared to deal with internal changes to the business and the external changes that affected the business was critical to address seasonality. In addition, they put faith in the marketing efforts of ‘Destination Queenstown’ and of the country, which were believed by the tourism operators to be the strategies to address the seasonal peaks and seasonality, aside from their internal strategies, such as staffing, budgeting, and infrastructure. They themselves commonly did not really feel involved other than with their own business strategies to deal with the seasonal peaks. They often felt that the federal government should be helping more, as the operators felt that the destination was contributing substantial revenue to the federal government and funds were not returning to the area to help deal with seasonal peaks. One transportation sector respondent commented:

> ‘Destination Queenstown’ and Tourism New Zealand can only try and market what they think is going to appreciate for the whole industry…but the developers will do whatever they want…. I’m not sure it can be managed in all honesty. I think people make a great show about trying to manage it and trying to plan and try to develop [but] in essence the market will decide as it always does.

Indeed the operators were very aware that their business experienced high and low periods of business, even though most did not know what the concept of seasonality

was. Like the respondent from the restaurant sector above, some operators did have very detailed plans. One the other hand, other operators had a “fly by the seat of your pants” attitude (as one respondent put it) when addressing seasonal diversification of the industry and dealing with low or high seasonal peaks.

As stated in the literature review, operators use the seasonal lull in business to take their own vacation and to update and improve their business operations (Goulding, Baum and Morrison 2004). The accounts of the tourism operators of Queenstown indicated that they did not resent the low period of business, but rather accepted it. Nonetheless, though it gave them the opportunity to have their own vacation and/or update business, operators were doing these things to pass time and would rather have been kept busy. Operators felt that there has been a decrease over the years in seasonal drops in business, but they did acknowledge that the seasonal variations still very much existed, and knew what time of the year these drops or spikes in their business would occur.

The effects of seasonality on tourist arrivals and expenditures caused their sector to secure their business during low periods of tourism by ensuring that necessary measures, such as having a budget that would allow for little or no business or fewer staff, are in place to sustain business during the low period(s).

## 4.2 Summary

This chapter provided a detailed account of the research information gathered through individual interviews in each tourism sector (as described in Chapter Three), analysed the results that emerged when the sectors were compared with each other, and discussed the themes that grew out of this analysis and comparison. Four themes (staffing, infrastructure, monetary/management of business, and seasonal peaks) that emerged from the five sectors constituted both a perception and a reality for the tourism operators within the Queenstown, New Zealand area. In addressing the central question of this thesis, it was determined that seasonality is indeed a concern for the tourism sector in Queenstown, and the respondents from each sector had their own respective policies to ensure business longevity to the best of their ability and available resources. The boom-and-bust cycle of infrastructure in Queenstown has led to concerns and confusion on how tourism operators should properly address this

problem. Staffing, although still a continuing challenge for tourism businesses given the impact of seasonal highs and lows, is a problem more easily remedied by operators. By adding or reducing staff, businesses are able to adhere strictly to fixed costs and budget, allowing for some sort of sustainability. It is sustainability of a business that is paramount for all operators questioned, and it is the balance between management and seasonality that gauges whether or not the tourism business will be successful in the long run. It was concluded that businesses run by larger corporations were less worried upon approaching seasonal low periods, as extra funds could be injected into the business if necessary  The independent businesses, however, relied on overdraft and careful budgeting to address the low periods of business caused by seasonality. It is the locally-owned businesses that had to more carefully plan and strategise for an upcoming seasonal low. Modification of accounts, employees, business hours, and flows of funds within the company are all strategies readily adopted during low periods in the locally-owned tourism business. All operators agreed that it is the act of being prepared to deal with both internal changes to the business and the external changes that affected the business that is critical in dealing with seasonality. The federal government also has a hand to play in the tourism industry. Respondents believed governing bodies should be helping more, since Queenstown was contributing substantial revenue to the federal government, yet funds were not flowing back into the area. In short, the accounts of the tourism operators of Queenstown indicated that they did not resent the low period of business but rather accepted it. The operators felt that there has been a decrease over the years in seasonal drops in business, but they did acknowledge that the seasonal variations still very much existed, and knew what time of the year these drops or spikes in their business would occur.

Tourism is a resource that is beneficial to an area as it brings in new ideas, infrastructure, employment, and business (Hall and Page 1999). In order to minimise the inevitable negative impacts that tend to surface due to seasonality during the low periods of tourism business, it is important to create solutions to reduce the impact of seasonality and preserve the destination's economy (Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff 2005). Based on the respondents' comments, it is clear that these solutions or strategic plans must be created in union with all actors involved (government, tourism operators, investors, and local communities), thereby providing well-rounded

strategies to try to resolve a problem that affects everyone in the area. In summation, the answers the tourism operators provided coupled with previous tourism seasonality research can lead to the very stepping stone of integration in order to work towards alleviating tourism seasonality in Queenstown. Chapter Five, the final chapter of this thesis, will summarise the main contributions and conclusions of the research and concludes with recommendations of how the findings may be used for policy development.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter Five concludes this thesis with an overall summary of the research study conducted on seasonality in Queenstown's tourism industry. The first section will present the four main themes (staffing, infrastructure, monetary/management of business, and seasonal peaks) that arose from the exploratory research conducted in Queenstown. It will also review the research aims and objectives set out at the commencement of this thesis. The second section will present an evaluation of the methods used in conducting a qualitative study and provide recommendations for further explorations to address seasonality specific to the perceptions of tourism operators. The third section offers options for future research in this study area and suggests contributions made by this research. The fourth and final section will conclude with comments regarding the thesis process.

### 5.1 Themes, Research Aims, and Objectives

The themes of staffing, infrastructure, monetary/management of business, and seasonal peaks emerged as the Queenstown tourism respondents' four predominant concerns regarding their perception of seasonality. More specifically, these four concerns were believed by the tourism operators to be causing gaps in the success of their businesses. Understanding the perceptions and resultant concerns of these tourism operators provides vital information to the tourism industry of New Zealand, which in turn can work to address those concerns. A strategy that could assist the tourism industry of New Zealand in addressing the shortfalls of seasonality, such as the four concerns presented, could be to ensure that government services to off-set the negative financial impacts of seasonality either be implemented or made more accessible (Connell, Page and Bentley 2009). However, not all local governments have the knowledge and financial means to enforce tourism changes that would benefit their destination (Page and Hall 1999). Nonetheless, it is the local government's responsibility to work through these limitations towards a sustainable platform for the destination (Connell, Page, and Bentley 2009).

The first intent of this research was to investigate whether the tourism business sector of Queenstown perceives seasonality to be an issue, which resulted in a clear affirmation that seasonality is indeed perceived to be an issue. However, tourism operators largely believe that 'Destination Queenstown' is addressing the marketing to minimise seasonality and increase tourism business for Queenstown. In addition, to cope with seasonal lows caused by seasonality, the operators have developed their own strategies such as budgeting, management strategies, and so forth. Generally, tourism operators adjusted their operations based on the supposition that such adjustments will deliver a favourable financial gain for their business (Tepelus 2003). Ultimately, the success of tourism operators in maintaining sustainable businesses depends on the resources that the operators, whether small, medium, or corporate, have available to them (Wijk and Persoon 2006).

The second intent of this research was to determine what issues, if any, were perceived to be problematic to the respondents from the Queenstown tourism business sector if seasonality was not perceived to be an issue. In the findings, the tourism sector stated unanimously that they did perceive seasonality to be an issue; however, it was a researcher error that interviewees did not have a clear understanding of seasonality. Often the answers to questions using the word seasonality were based on guesses as to its meaning and the interviewer had to stop the interview to provide a brief explanation of the meaning of seasonality.

The third intent of the research was to determine whether the respondents believed that the tourism business sector combats seasonality due to tourism development; it was determined that they do not combat seasonality due to tourism development. In addition, an attempt was made to discover if seasonality was considered an issue in Queenstown, if the tourism business owners adjust their business according to seasonality, and, if they did so, how and why.

The interviews and data examination found that seasonality was seen as an issue in Queenstown and that tourism business owners do adjust their business according to seasonality. Staffing, management, and budgeting to keep the operation afloat until tourists return again are all strategies used by the tourism business sector. Seasonality impacts employment and investors, and can cause reduced profits. The

coping strategies currently in place to combat seasonality are, for the most part, individual efforts by individual operators rather than a concerted effort across the industry (Amelung, Nicholls and Viner 2008; Jang 2004).

The fourth intent was to identify whether problem areas are related to tourism business issues or to seasonality issues. It was discovered that the problem areas tended to be financial in nature, including staffing and a lack of tourists due to seasonal lows caused by seasonality. Therefore, the problems were largely related to a lack of planning and management to deal with the impacts of seasonality, such as boom-and-bust cycles and the infrastructure that is suitable for a seasonal destination.

The fifth intent was to generate options to modify businesses from a) seasonal operations to year-round ones and b) from problematic business issues to sustainable business plans.

a) Upon reflection based on interviews with the selected respondents, it was clear that the task of modifying a business from a seasonal to a year-round operation can be a monumental task. More specifically, it seemed clear from speaking with the selected tourism operators that to modify the business from a seasonal operation to a year-round one would require long-term planning and consulting and collaboration with other destinations, business owners (of all sizes), residents, and governments. It was also noted through collaboration with the various selected operators that not all tourism businesses will work the same in every destination. For example, large companies may not be able to sustain business in small population areas, or a small business may not excel in a specific tourism sector within an urban centre. Moreover, depending on the types of tourists the destination is seeking, the existing infrastructure and geographical climate need to be considered in the formation of the destination's goals and outcomes. To encourage a balance of equity throughout a tourism business sector, a committee could be established. Ideally, such a committee could have a delegate from each entity represented, and votes from each sector be given equal weight. The findings from this research suggest smaller businesses or individual business owners had less attention given to them than larger corporations with a large amount of money at their disposal, conceivably influencing the outcome of the destination's goals. In order to have a balanced tourism industry, resources should be spread to all

tourism businesses. More specifically, the size, type of business (accommodation vs. outdoor recreation), owner(s), the area in which the business is located (rural/urban), and the types of consumers are all examples of variables that will affect the management of the business operation within the tourism industry and should be considered in order to ensure sustainable tourism business practices (Ateljevic 2006).

b) The selected tourism operators involved in this thesis research commonly felt out of the loop when it came to the success of the tourism industry of Queenstown. The operators either wanted to be involved and were not asked or they felt it was being addressed but were not sure how. It may be suggested that a main body that is to initiate tourism in the destination area needs to consult with other stakeholders in the tourism industry. Having a representative from each main sector within the destination will help to provide a viewpoint from these sectors, while having a viewpoint from each sector will help to minimise roadblocks occurring in the future or hostility due to the lack of communication within the tourism industry and the destination. Determining goals, costs and benefits for the tourism industry of a destination can empower and/or present the weaknesses of area and lessen the unknown (Getz and Nilsson 2004). Whilst it is imperative that residents in resort settings be included, they must also be reminded that their town is not solely a town but also a resort whose focus is tourism.

## 5.2 Evaluation of Methods and Recommendations

The methods used to conduct the research were appropriate when cost, time, and resources were used as a measurement of success for this research. The selection of the qualitative method for this research allowed for a diverse amount of information to be gathered due to the range of tourism operators working within the various sectors (Decrop 1999; Braum and Clarke 2006). It is recommended that if a similar study of this nature was undertaken in the future, careful planning and organisation would be paramount to manage the various stages and layers of themes and patterns that emerge (Lacey and Luff 2001). Reading literature and talking with fellow researchers will help prepare the researcher to navigate the pitfalls and

success of conducting this type of research method, which can be daunting at times and seem endless. Having clear deadlines and objectives will reduce the possibility of becoming lost in the data.

Below are two general, yet practical, recommendations for tourism operators to consider in light of the negative impacts of seasonality on their industry. The recommendations were developed as a result of interactions with Queenstown tourism operators and extensive data analysis, as well as through reflection on the impact of seasonality and the solutions tourism operators currently use to deal with it. The two recommendations are as follows:

*First Recommendation*

1. Business plans must not be rigid and inflexible, but broad enough to cope with change inherent in seasonality. The business and its employees must be adaptable, which has both positive and negative effects (i.e., do-it-yourself maintenance to save money vs. knowing when to lay off staff to conserve monetary funds to 'keep business alive').

*Second Recommendation*

3. Business plans should be open to the idea of partnerships with complementary businesses in different sectors.

## 5.3 Future Research: Lessons Learnt from Queenstown and Contribution to the Field

During the process of this thesis, a focus was placed on how the sectors within the Queenstown tourism industry can work towards a common goal that satisfies everyone (visitors, residents, business owners, investors, governments - council, regional, federal). To an outsider observing the dynamics of the tourism business operators' perception of seasonality, the primary impression was lack of communication both within the industry in Queenstown and within the country of New Zealand. It seemed that everyone's intentions were warranted, but that no one was working together to make the industry work as a unit, as each individual had his/her interpretation of what type of plan would lead to success. Moreover, if there was a plan in place, it seemed that not everyone was included or welcome to

participate. Monetary influence or progress of the business within the sector appeared to contribute to the impact on the decision or influence on the style of tourism encouraged within Queenstown. There appeared to be frustration from various operators due to being independent and struggling to make their business work within the sector with no motivation or standards to work with as an industry. It appeared that they did not feel included in the process even though they had many thoughts regarding the state of the present tourism industry within Queenstown. The result from this research has allowed a doorway to be opened to understand a brief view of the perceptions of seasonality held by the tourism operators in Queenstown.

The impacts of seasonality can be devastating to all concerned, including the government (Jefferson 1986). Moreover, relying solely on tourism as a way to stimulate an area can be detrimental to that area, as the negative impacts of tourism may outweigh the positive ones (Marshall 2001; Flognfeldt 2001; Murphy 1985). In addition, it is critical that governments offer accessible services and continually work to customise the tourism industry to seasonality by tailoring specific employment programs and implementing policies to support seasonal employees faced with reduced incomes. Such programmes could include, for instance, supplementing rental income during the low season (Doswell 1997; Higham and Hinch; Godfrey and Clark 2000; Bodlender 1991, Bonnick 2000; Tourism Development in the Carribean 2004; Duval and Wilkinson 2004, World Tourism Organization 2000; Collier 1999; Flognfedt 2001).

The two key questions to consider from the data presented in this thesis are as follows: how has Queenstown harnessed the positive and negative aspects of seasonality to build a sustainable tourism industry, and what characteristics (historical, cultural, and financial) of the established businesses in each sector make(s) them successful and sustainable over the long-term? These questions need to be examined further both to understand seasonality more fully and to build a long-term viable tourism industry.

This exploratory study was an attempt to contribute to the field of seasonality research within the tourism industry. The intent of this research was to present a clearer view of the obstacles confronting Queenstown tourism operators in relation to

seasonality, with the results and discussion of this thesis facilitating further communication and consultation amongst tourism operators to delineate their concerns, challenges, and solutions. Understanding both their obstacles and triumphs will encourage other tourism operators, residents, investors, and the tourism industry as a whole to share ideas, regardless of their financial backgrounds and existing financial contributions. Moreover, it is important that communication within the industry be expanded to contribute to better planning and sustainable tourism for all operators and stakeholders equally.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This thesis is by no means a comprehensive exploration of the perceptions of seasonality of Queenstown tourism operators, but rather should be seen as an overview of the perceptions that do exist. The perceptions of the tourism operators interviewed for this study are extremely valuable as they allow the industry to know what leading problems are being faced, whether they be quality of service, lack of business support, or how business owners are sustaining their business during the low seasons. The four themes identified in this research are evidence that tourism operators are business owners who have utilised their wit and imagination to survive, despite the difficulties caused by seasonality. In the future, it would be beneficial for councils and other levels of government to work with tourism operators of all sizes to understand and contribute to the sector's sustainability (and the tourism operators' peace of mind) with resources, conferences, workshops, and other means of support.

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# APPENDIX ONE

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions

**Grand Tour Questions**

**(1)** How old is this business?
**(2)** How long have you owned this business?
**(3)** Is working in the tourism industry a choice of lifestyle or for financial gain?
**(4)** A lot of people tell me that personal satisfaction is gained operating a tourism business in Queenstown. Would you agree? Why?
**(5)** In your personal opinion, what are the potential issues facing tourism businesses in the tourism sector of Queenstown? Why?
**(6)** Do you think seasonality is affecting your business? (i.e. school holidays, and/or weather.) How?

**Background of Business and Scope of Seasonality Knowledge**

**(1)** What does seasonality mean to you and your business?
**(2)** What obstacles do you foresee arising in the tourism business sector from seasonality in Queenstown? Explain.
**(3a)** Do you think the Queenstown tourism business sector has the financial backing of the government and the national tourism industry to combat seasonality? Why do you say that?
**(3b)** What business support is out there?
**(4)** In your opinion do you believe the tourism business sector of Queenstown successfully manage the growth of tourism in areas of planning and development? How? Has it always been this way?
**(5a)** Are there any outside constraints facing the tourism businesses in this area? Examples may include restrictive policies, lack of investors, environmental, government and infrastructure constraints.

**(5b)** Tell me about any other constraints facing the tourism business sector in Queenstown that were not mentioned earlier. Such as employment issues, transportation and limited capacity of accommodations.

**(6)** In your experience how does seasonality of tourists' arrivals and expenditures affect you?

**(7)** In your opinion, does your business experience seasonal fluctuations?

**(8a)** Do you see your business reaching a seasonal peak or does it maintain consistent performance through out the year?

**(8b)** Generally speaking when do these peaks arise? During the same time or at different times each year?

**(9a)** Tell me how you manage your employees as a resource with respect to the seasonal fluctuations you've just told me about. (i.e. seasonal and/or permanent.)

**(9b)** Do you employee the same amount of employees all year round? How many?

**Support in Queenstown**

**(1)** In your opinion does the Queenstown council, businesses and government think seasonality (or seasonal concerns) is a problem in Queenstown? Why?

**(2)** In your opinion what are the seasonal tourism business concerns that could be fixed by government or council? (i.e. employee staffing concerns, low sales, environmental and policies concerns). Why?

**(3)** In your opinion does the council and regional government address structural concerns critical to the development of tourism within Queenstown such as sewage, infrastructure? How?

**Business Perceptive of Queenstown Business**

**(1)** Do you believe seasonality could change internal operations of tourism businesses in Queenstown? (i.e. employment, infrastructure) How?

**(2)** Do you believe seasonality challenges the unity of the industry in Queenstown, such as the operations, transportation and sewage? Explain.